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Power to Represent:
The Spatialized Politics of Style in Houston Hip Hop

by

Christopher Michael Taylor

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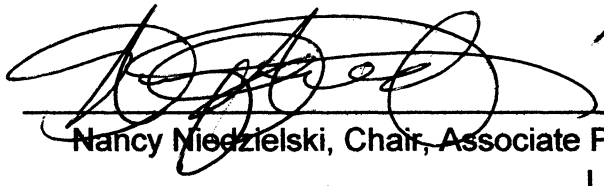
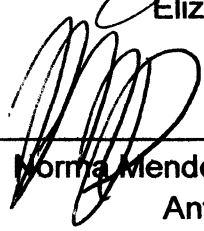


Nancy Niedzielski, Chair, Associate Professor, Linguistics

Stephen A. Tyler, Professor, Anthropology

Elizabeth Long, Professor, Sociology



Norma Mendoza-Denton, Associate Professor, Anthropology (University of Arizona)

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Abstract

Combining quantitative sociophonetic methods and a qualitative, ethnographic approach to the study of language and social relations, my current research program focuses on the role of language in competing hip hop cultures. This research draws on early scholarship in cultural studies (Hebdige 1979), as well as what some have termed post- subcultural studies (Muggleton & Weinzierl 2003). Central to my own work are two theoretical concerns shared by these currents of scholarship, including:

(1) How sociohistorical forces (including institutionally-mediated social action) shape cultural frameworks for symbolically staking out a position in the social landscape

(2) How prominent social positioning in local cultural hierarchies shapes popular ideas regarding such intersecting notions as authenticity and indigineity

Regarding the first of these concerns, I examine how popular hip hop artists reflexively bring into focus a repertoire of spatialized social practices by rapping about them in their music – a discursive practice I term metastylistic discourse. By selectively rapping about social practices indexical of their experiences of place, not only communicate a particular take on the local (i.e. their own); they directly position social and indirectly position sociolinguistic

practices centrally among stylistic practices distinguishing Houston aesthetically from the cultural forms associated with other scenes.

Central here is the second concern I share with current approaches to cultural studies, particularly, the significance of where social actors (i.e. established artists) find themselves in local social hierarchies. Established artists shape and reshape ways of talking about local life partly through econtextualizing prior texts. It is through the circulation of such texts that a discursive framework emerges, the product of a trans-modal series of recontexutalizations which serve to communicate an experience of Houston, what it looks and sounds like.

In short, my current project works to close the gap between sociolinguistic approaches to the formation and interrogation of stylistic norms and research in cultural studies along these same lines (Hodkinson 2003, Piano 2003). By examining these processes in the context of hip hop, my work illustrates how social actors shape cultural norms through performance

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Introduction

1.1 Constructed Dialogue as a Window onto the Community

I begin this dissertation with a short but dense passage which speaks to a number of issues central to the present project. The passage comes from an interview I conducted with Houston DJ and promoter Big Chance (BC)[1] in the Spring of 2004, a time when local currents in Houston hip hop were on the verge of gaining national attention. As I write this introduction, six years have passed, during which time Houston recaptured the public imagination with its distinctive style of rap music (Frere-Jones 2005, Sanneh 2005). In the passage, BC and I are in the middle of a conversation regarding what makes Houston hip hop style distinctive.

Central below is the essentialist framing of stylistic indigeneity achieved through constructed dialogue: By "styling the other," (Rampton 1999) BC implicitly equates sounding "local" with a particular genre of Houston hip hop, namely, the freestyle or improvisational style of rapping associated with Houston's Southside. BC indexes this style of performance in at least two ways – (1) by using a salient local expression, "comin' dahn,"[2] and (2) monophthongizing /aw/ (in the lexeme "down," [da:n]). Through this monophthongal realization, BC reveals what sort of hip hop he perceives – and believes others perceive – to be representative of Houston:

[1] Throughout the dissertation, when citing interviews with public figures in Houston's hip hop scene, I use with consent the interviewee's stage name.
[2] I use the spelling "dahn" to capture the monophthongization of /aw/.

Excerpt 1.1: Big Chance on "rappin like you from Houston Texas"

1	BC	And and y'know it, uh, uh, like I said it's a style like uh..
2		no other <H> AND, you know what I, you know what I hate, uh..
3		I—this is one thing I dislike about Houston artists…
4		They'll say, "ah" they'll come up to me "ah yeah I don' rap like that
5		comin' dahhn and, all that otha stuff", and what I tell people is, Dog, w—
6		it's nothin wrong with, that rappin like you from Houston Texas cause
7		some cats'll come down here and "ah I don't sound like these boys around
8		here" Well there's nothing wrong with nothing wrong with soundin like
9		'em it's what you put into it [I mean]
10	C	[thas right]
11	BC	it's, it's not—it's nothing wrong with soundin like 'em, cause I'm a tell
12		you what, The, the people you tryin sound like the East and the, and the,
13		and the, and the ATLs but you know how they tryin to sound like, you
14		know who they, who they listenin to? Yall, Houston cats. Down here
15		{dahn hiyuh}
16	C	mhmm
17	BC	You you you know, you don't want talk about syrup, but these diplomatic
18		cats {=a rap group from the East Coast} got a drink called sizzyrup, you
19		[know'm sayin'?]
20	C	[mmhmm]
21	BC	So…You, why you downgradin', it's like not be you, it's like, walkin
22		around not bein comfortable in your own skin

In this 22-line passage, BC offers his perspectives on stylistic indigeneity (i.e. what it means to act and sound "local"), as well as normative expectations regarding authenticity, in his appraisal of a Houston-bred ambivalence. For example, in lines 4-5, BC constructs dialogue consisting in a fictive exchange between a combative local MC and BC himself. The defensive character he portrays claims he "don't rap like that *comin' dahn* and, all that otha stuff."

In this dense and revealing dialogue, BC's fictive interactant voices a stereotypic Southside artist by exploiting indexicalities – socially-fragmented, pragmatic associations

– of the expression "comin' dahn." A popular phrase often used by Southside artists, "comin' dahn" refers to a manifestation of talent, lyrical or otherwise. More importantly, in the constructed dialogue, the phrase indexes not only a popular style of freestyle rap associated with the Southside (and to a lesser extent the Northside) of Houston; "comin' dahn" indexes the popular, iconic rappers who frequently employ this expression in their music.

Central here are a number of ways in which BC's ventriloquism[3] interacts with the surrounding co-text of the interview. Nowhere else is the phrase "comin' dahn" used, and throughout the interview, BC realizes /aw/ diphthongally on the whole. No other word containing this variable is realized as monphthongally as the lengthened (39 ms), stylized variant. Thus, by adhering to the intertextual precedent of monophthizing /aw/ in "comin dahn," BC performs what he and his constructed character perceive to be the representative style of Houston rap music. BC evokes this style metonymically through a part-whole relationship in which one salient phrase indexes a broader, spatialized style.

Key is how, in line 6, BC implicitly equates this style of rap with indigeneity, that is, what it means to be/sound local: "it's nothin wrong with, that rappin like you from Houston Texas." For BC, the salient expression in question is part and parcel of a style he views – and imagines others to view – as representative of Houston rap. In a naturalizing move, BC portrays popular Southside rap as *the* way to sound local in Houston's hip hop scene: "rappin' like you from Houston Texas" amounts to using indexical semiotic practices including the expression "comin' dahn" and the monophthongal variant it contains. So, through our exchange, BC reveals how this style functions stereotypically for him and, as later chapters will show, many other participants in Houston hip hop

[3] In the sense of Bakhtin (1984).

cultures. Here, we see the rhetorical construction of normativity through stereotypification, and the shared expectations that follow circulation and uptake.

Sharing – even in partial, fragmented ways – predictive ideas regarding social action, participants in the distinct and competing hip hop cultures of Houston orient toward a normativity produced through the essentializing rhetoric of locally-popular rap music. BC comments on negative responses to this normativity through the perspectives taken by the fictive character in the constructed dialogue. Specifically, this character claims not to sound like a stereotypic Southside rapper. Here, the constructed dialogue illustrates an awareness of discord among social actors with different, competing takes on what Houston hip hop does or should sound like.

As I argue in this dissertation, semiotic differentiation undergirds and perpetuates discord among youth cultures regarding what ultimately distinguishes Houston from cultural forms associated with other regions. We see this tension in passage 1.1, for example, in lines 8-11, where BC claims "it's nothin wrong with...rappin like you from Houston Texas." Implicit in this comment is an asymmetry in positive and negative attitudes toward the portrayal of and belief in Southside hip hop – and similar currents of local rap – as distinctively representative of Houston. Artists and subculturalists with a stake in maintaining the prominence of these styles performatively (re)construct a discourse which naturalizes their indigeneity. We see this in lines 1-9 of the passage, in which BC aligns his notion of localness in Houston hip hop – "rappin like you from Houston Texas" – with Southside hip hop and its iconic, trendsetting DJ Screw. Thus, what it means to sound local gets swept up in the ideological "work of representation," (Hall 1997), even in mundane exchanges between a DJ and a hip hop researcher.

Ideological processes such as essentialization contribute to the production of collectively-shared beliefs regarding what it means to sound like a rapper in Houston. Essentialization factors centrally in the present work, as it underpins the social production of a stereotypic center and cultural margins, themes explored in detail throughout the dissertation. In addition to and complementing these themes, I explore the mediating effects of stereotypification through micro-level conversational exchanges, as well as through channels of institutionalized distribution, such as the radio, record labels, and the internet.

Social circulation through do-it-yourself (DIY) modes of distribution, as well as through corporately-owned, institutionalized culture industries, contribute to promoting particular images of localness portrayed in popular hip hop. Established artists engaged in producing compatible images of localness have more "airtime" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003) and, as local social icons (Eckert 2000, Mendoza-Denton 2007), they are uniquely positioned to wield influence. Specifically, these iconic artists shape shared ideas regarding which stylistic practices and characterological figures distinguish Houston hip hop in the public imagination as a unique scene – an imagined community (Anderson 1995).

In this dissertation, I explore the sociohistorical processes which give rise to discourses of indigeneity and authenticity in Houston hip hop, discourses which both enable and constrain future performances. In laying down an authoritative history of textual precedents, established artists play a role in mediating social action, producing a normative framework for evoking one's indigeneity or sense of "rootedness." As passage 1.1 suggests, some Houston rappers reject the singularlizing association of indigeneity in

Houston rap music with a narrow range of hip hop artists and the shared repertoire of social practices which give shape to these dominant currents. Participants in such currents socially differentiate themselves from the cultural center in myriad ways, including through the indexicality of stylistic practices.

These practices include phonetic variation and rhetorical strategies associated with constructing a hood-oriented, on-mic personae. For example, popular local artists often rap about the social practices they engage in while they hustle, "ball," and "parlay" on the streets of their neighborhoods. In so doing, popular artists evoke characterlogical qualities associated with these practices, as well as a connection to place. Imbued with socio-spatial meanings, these practices communicate an array of social information, fleshing out discursive figures (Agha 2007), such as the salient G and thug subject positions. Rappers use language to highlight these socially-charged stylistic practices, such as the use of "syrup," referred to in lines 17-18 of the passage above, as well as in countless local songs.

Also known as "drank,"[4] syrup has come to function emblematically of a dominant, hip hop social formation in Houston. Much in the same way "comin' dahn" doubly indexes a lived experience of place, the expression "sippin' drank" both refers to a socially-positioned stylistic practice and evokes the practitioner's sociocultural qualities through the indexicality of /i/-lowering pre-engma. What these linguistic elements – "sippin' drank" and "comin' dahn" – exemplify are textual precedents set by established artists. These precedents turn around and serve as resources for portraying one's experience of and connection to place. Semiotically-dense texts and the phono-lexical variables that comprise them become tethered to an image of localness.

[4] I use this spelling to capture the lowering of /I/ pre-engma.

Therefore, artists who do not identify with the qualities and stances indexically associated with established rappers face a problem. By producing some measure of consensus regarding what local hip hop sounds like, established artists complicate the expression of rootedness for rappers who cut a discursive figure different from the status quo. Understanding this process and its consequences drives much of the research I report on in the following pages. For example, I provide and discuss evidence that popular rappers engage in semiotic boundary construction, which marginalizes competing cultures of hip hop in Houston.

In addition to normatively constraining social action, authoritative acts of boundary construction provide intertextual resources for future performances – a framework for "doing (one-kind-of) local." Later in the dissertation, I examine how up-and-coming artists draw on this framework to communicate their rootedness (as well as other social qualities), through rhetorical strategies and phonetic variation. I also address the question of how marginalized artists utilize style (referred to in line 1) to critique dominant norms in popular Houston hip hop. For instance, in Chapters Four and Six I describe how dissonant local rappers parody established artists by utililzing stylistic practices associated with the subjects they aim to critique. This parodic criticism involves collectively orienting to norms and troping on them, a process yielding rich insights into what some have dubbed "cultural models" (D'Andrade 1987), based in part on intertextual precedents for the use of stylistic practices toward particular, relational ends.

1.2 Questions, Data, Methods

Broadly speaking, I address the following questions in the dissertation:

1. What micro- and macro-level social processes underlie the sedimentation of stylistic norms in the field of hip hop cultural production?
2. How does the sedimentation of such norms mediate self-presentation in hip hop music?
3. What can hip hop parody tell us about norms shared both harmoniously and in dissonance?

To answer these questions, I draw on a range of methods and data in the dissertation. Most importantly, this work is informed by four years of ethnographic research, spent primarily at a radio program that provided a social space where people gathered – inside and out – to network, document, and promote themselves. It has been through this experience that I have met many of the people whose thoughts and comments are cited in this work. While participant observation at a weekly radio program undergirds much of the present work, I have also attended hip hop shows, rap concerts,[5] and listening parties.

Beyond these experiences, I have spent a number of nights entertaining friends who not only share a passion for (Houston) hip hop, but also play a role in making local rap music and culture "happen," including people who rap, DJ, produce, write for and publish magazines, promote events, design and pass out promotional material, and so on.

[5] Different people use different terms, sometimes synonomously, sometimes to communicate social differences.

My many conversations with these people – digitally-recorded or simply noted – provide background, pieces of the narrative unfolding.

In §3.3, I describe in detail the experience I had at Damage Control, a local, independent hip hop radio program housed at the Houston KPFT station. I describe briefly how global processes of norming, circulated through modern information networks such as the internet, stand in dialogue with more local interactions which draw on, reproduce, and even reject prior texts and their social implications. Central to communicating my take on this interplay is qualitative analysis of ethnographic interviews, hip hop interviews, song lyrics, and blog postings. Each of these data sources provides a window onto the partially-shared assumptions lending coherence to a community of artists mutually engaged in performing hip hop music in Houston.

In addition to the qualitative analysis of these recorded materials, I operationalize three rhetorical strategies and discuss the quantitative analysis of their asymmetrical use. By calculating a proportion, based on dividing the total usages of a strategy by the total lines per album (for each speaker), I carry out a quantiative comparison across the five rhetorical dimensions in question. This approach lends itself to the use of cluster analysis, through which statistically-significant groupings based on rhetorical variation provide converging evidence that artists use rhetorical strategies asymmetrically, in socially-meaningful ways. I compare these findings with an analysis of phonetic variation across well-known and up-and-coming hip hop artists. Using Spearman's correlation test and clustering methods, I examine the degree to which phonetic variation and asymmetries in the use of rhetorical strategies correlate.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

In the next chapter, I open with a socio-historical discussion of influential conceptualizations of style which have influenced my own approach. Chapters One and Two focus on style as a theoretical construct that captures both intra- and inter-individual semiotic variation. In Chapter One, I outline several conceptualizations of style key to the current project, including the work of Penny Eckert and her students. Chapter Two presents a synthesis of work that examines processes underlying the sedimentation of style both in formal terms, as social practices which "hang together" (Coupland 2007), as well as in pragmatic terms, as fluid relationships between practice, personae, and characterological qualities. In this chapter I spend some time discussing how style becomes indexically associated with particular experiences of place, a concept captured by Agha's theoretical construct, enregisterment (Agha 2003, 2007).

Chapter Three takes a historical perspective on the emergence of stylistic norms in Houston hip hop, both at the macro- and micro-levels. In this tripartite chapter, I open by providing a brief history of rap music in Houston. Next, I discuss the roles DJ Screw and Michael Watts played in shaping the stylistic boundaries of a current in local hip hop which gained national attention around 2005. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss three rhetorical strategies – metastylistic discourse, emplacement, and self-categorization – which popular artists associated with both aforementioned DJs use to essentialize social relations and indigeneity in popular hip hop. Finally, in the third part of Chapter Three, I describe my experiences at a local, weekly hip hop radio show – Damage Control. Hosted by accomplished journalist Matt Sonzala, Damage Control has perennially provided independent, unsigned artists with an opportunity to circulate and talk about their music.

Local icon Sonzala launched the show on Houston Pacifica public radio, providing for circumstances under which he has enjoyed freedom to take chances on unvetted Houston artists, chances that corporate radio does not take.

In this section, I discuss how Damage Control not only put into circulation independent music, but also, as a physical site with various spaces for people to promote themselves by networking, the locale of the show and its in-place social relations (employees & volunteers, e.g.) provide an environment for and partially structure interactions among regulars and newcomers. I describe how conversations and "cyphers"[6] provide us with windows onto the social scene in which rappers produce norms through mundane and spectacular exchanges and performances.

Chapter Four examines the potential parody holds for rappers to challenge the norms produced intertextually in popular hip hop. By voicing the artists they aim to challenge, parodists level a "self"-directed critique that questions the socially-constructed nature of the G's (exclusive) indigeneity. Through the use of tactics including critical hyperbole and self-directed criticism, marginalized artists wage a veiled attack on the desirability and naturalness of social practices and personae associated with dominant currents of Houston hip hop. Key here is the idea that the critique is veiled, that is, it is executed in such a way that one must possess some local knowledge which, as it were, fills in the parodic gaps. As I argue, the audience plays a key role in co-constructing this veiled critique, as recognizing the cues that a performance is parodic depends in some measure of shared knowledge regarding Houston's competing hip hop cultures and the issues surrounding them.

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[6] A group of MCs taking turns, collaboratively rapping.

Chapter Five expands on the investigation of dissonant norms by examining structured variation in the use of the three essentializing strategies – metastylistic discourse, emplacement, and self-categorization. To explore how these specific rhetorical tactics correlate with differential social positioning, I combine qualitative and quantitative methods to make tractable the rhetorical strategies in question. Specifically, I operationalize their use by isolating lexical items necessarily employed to carry out a particular rhetorical strategy – itself associated with a lexico-pragmatic domain (e.g., "car culture" and terms referring to material artifacts and social practices which give shape to this field of cultural production).

Drawing on methods designed to flesh out asymmetries in the use of cultural practices, I quantify instances of each rhetorical strategy, for each artist, to determine whether statistically-significant, inter-speaker differences exist in the use of these tactics. By considering individually the constituent elements of metastylistic discourse – fashion, car culture, and drug culture – I examine, in total, five rhetorical strategies, tactics shown to index popular style in Houston rap music. After quantifying the raw data, I calculate a figure equal to the proportion of lines containing one or more of the rhetorical strategies in question to the total number of lines per album. For example, on an album containing 203 lines, if the artist makes use of emplacement 17 times, we may say confidently that approximately 10% (.098) of the lines (i.e. half-couplets) on this album involve the rhetorical act of emplacement.

By calculating this figure for each rhetorical strategy separately, we may compare percentages across five dimensions, providing for the use of cluster analysis to determine high-likelihood statistical groupings according to similarity along each dimension. This

approach proves useful because it reduces the roles of intuition and self-report in determining how the rhetorical data compare or break down across artists (cf. LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985), making it possible to group them according to numerical asymmetries in the five-dimensional, rhetorically-based arrays which characterize each artist.

In Chapter Six, I discuss relationships between the statistical findings of Chapter Five and those resulting from an analysis of phonetic variation in the music of local hip hop artists. Using Spearman's correlational test, I assess the degree to which the processes of /aw/ variation and /I/-lowering (pre-engma) statistically "hang together." (Coupland 2007) Furthermore, by re-running the cluster analysis, combining the two patterns of phonetic variation to the rhetorical variation, I determine the extent to which the initial, statistically-based groupings remain the same or change.

Finally, I leverage the power of regression analysis to evaluate the degree to which rhetorical groupings help "explain" phonetic variation. Thus, I cast light on the interrelatedness not only of a range of rheotrical strategies, but also of structured phonetic variation and its place among rhetorical variation in constructing distinct, on-mic personae. I discuss the implications of this research, its current status, and directions for future study in Chapter Six.

Chapter Two

Conceptualizing Style

2.1 Three Approaches to Style

2.1.1 Introduction

Style has played a crucial role both implicitly and explicitly in the study of language variation since the earliest days of modern sociolinguistics. As Rickford and Eckert (2001:2) point out, "William Labov's (1966) New York City study, which launched the current quantitative study of variation, gave central theoretical and methodological importance to style. This study established that stylistic variation constitutes a crucial nexus between the individual and the community..." Even before this insight, one which Finnegan and Biber (2001:242) have dubbed "the classic sociolinguistic finding," Labov's research on Martha's vineyard arguably provided some of the earliest evidence of the role played by linguistic variation in stylistically differentiating social groups in a conflict setting (Eckert 2004, 2005). These early studies (Labov 1966, 1972, *inter alios*) cemented the place of style as an analytic construct in the sociolinguist's repertoire of tools for understanding the social life of language variation.

Nevertheless, Rickford and Eckert (2001) note that "style became less of a focus of empirical research from the 1970s onward, at least in the influential American quantitative tradition." Recent years, however, have yielded a resurgence of interest in theorizing style in the sociolinguistic literature (Eckert 2000, Chun 2007, Kiesling 2009, Mendoza-Denton 2008, Podesva 2008, Podesva et al 2002, Rickford and Eckert 2001,

Schilling-Estes 2003, Zhang 2008 *inter alios*). In the following sections, I look at some conceptualizations of style that have influenced my own research, beginning with the view of style developed by Eckert and her students.

2.1.2 Eckert and the Stanford Tradition

One of the early pioneers of (re)theorizing style in sociolinguistics, Penelope Eckert has advocated an approach that departs sharply from the Labovian tradition of analyzing style solely in terms of intra-speaker variation. Eckert's work advances a view of linguistic style as "a complex construction of lexicon, prosody, segmental phonetics, morphology, syntax, [and] disocurse" which becomes linked with things speakers "do and say – with the attitudes and beliefs they project, and with the things they talk about." (Eckert 2000:1). This approach focuses on what Eckert has termed "'personal' or 'group style'," (Eckert 2001:123) terms which seek to capture the continual enterprise of localized meaning-making through which associations arise between subject positions, social formations, and stylistic practices. Juxtaposing these two terms, 'personal' and 'group', Eckert emphasizes the association of style with both the invididual – in part with what she and others have referred to as social icons – and the group, social formations reified through labels such as 'jocks' and 'burnouts.' (see Eckert 1989 and 2000)

Central here is the focus on style and inter-group dynamics. In contrast with traditional Labovian approaches to style, which focus on intra-speaker variation as a response to changes in contextual factors, Eckert proposes that style becomes associated with groups of speakers and iconic representatives of these groups when social differences between one group and another become foregrounded (Eckert 2004).

Difference, then, plays a crucial role in Eckert's view of style. Social practices which coalesce into a differentiable and recognizable style do so only under circumstances of contact, conflict, or juxtaposition, circumstances where 'sameness' takes a back seat to 'distinction' as we look out onto the "social landscape" and evaluate our place in relation to other spots on the map (Eckert 2004:5). With no intentions of fixity, this cartographical metaphor captures the way we construct social boundaries to make sense of our experiences with other people, particularly through evaluating ourselves as more or less like others along a number of dimensions, including the dimension of speech.

It is through these processes of evaluation, Eckert suggests, that social differences become linked with language variation, ultimately mapping the social onto the linguistic. From this perspective, stylistic variation 'makes sense' insofar as its related to – and constitutive of – differences between social groups. It is here that we note some additional ways in which Eckert's approach to style departs in its aims from the traditional quantitative study of style in sociolinguistics. To begin with, Eckert's interests lie in understanding how speakers do in fact make sense of variation, interpreting linguistic differences in relation to other forms of social differentiation and creating (reflexive) models of how these semiotic configurations reflect and constitute meaningful social distinctions. In this way, Eckert's appproach seeks to theorize the social meaning potential of language variation through the lens of style, "as style is the visible manifestation of social meaning" (Eckert 2004:43).

From this perspective, style embodies the oppositional dynamics which set social formations apart from one another. It is in this way that style becomes imbued with meaning and acquires its social semiotic functionality, ultimately proving fundamental to

social differentiation in semiotic terms. Important to note here, though, is the position Eckert takes regarding the relationship between social formations and styles as semiotic configurations.

Following Ochs (1992) and Silverstein (1976), Eckert (2000, 2004, 2005) argues that the social meaning of style does not reside in a simple direct indexical relationship between stylistic practices and social categories. That is, a given stylistic move may signify something like "female" or "jock," but it does so only indirectly. On this view, stances and ideological positions – either taken by social actors or attributed to them – ultimately constitute macro-social categories such as "female", or even more local categories such as "jocks" (Eckert 1989, 2000), "Sureñas" or "Norteñas" (Mendoza-Denton 1997, 2008), or "nerd girls" (Bucholtz 1999).

Central to this line of reasoning is a type of bottom-up theorizing based in part on the concept of "stance accretion", developed by Du Bois (2002) – and elaborated by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Eckert (2008), and Podesva and Moore (2009) – which aims "to capture the way in which stances accumulate into more *durable structures of identity*" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:596, my emphasis). From this perspective, stylistic practices come to index stances and ideological positions, such as indirectness, cynicism (Eckert 2008) or, in the case of Eckert's seminal work on Jocks and Burnouts, anti- or pro-school orientations (1989, 2000). Juxtaposing stancetaking with semiotic means of differentiation, including linguistic and non-linguistic practices, style and stance sediment through time[7], forms the fluid basis for the indexical meaning potential of stylistic practices. Thus, as Eckert (2004:44) notes, "stylistic resources...come with a meaning potential that becomes more precise in the local context." This meaning potential is

[7] See Coupland 2007 on entextualization processes and the diachronic dimensions of this process.

"vivified" (Eckert 2004, 2005) through the situated use of existent stylistic practices for the relational purpose of "fashioning selves" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003).

In advancing a position where speakers are social-meaning-makers, Eckert weaves together several significant theoretical constructs, including social practice, agency, and bricolage. From Eckert's position, and in contradistinction to traditional Labovian approaches to style, speakers become agents engaging in social practices which underpin the articulation not only of their "place in the social matrix but...the construction of new places and of nuanced social meanings." (Eckert 2004:47; cf. Zhang 2008). Such social constructivist theorizing rests on several observations regarding the place of linguistic variation in the broader system of social-semiotic differentiation. First, we as speakers exercise some form of mediated agency through the deployment of stylistic resources for relational purposes. Second, as Eckert and others have noted (Agha 2007, Eckert 2000, Gal 1989, Mendoza-Denton 1997, 2008 *inter alios*), these resources cross-cut modalities of signification, ranging from the sartorial and kinesic to the linguistic. Third, these resources come, as noted earlier, with "some general conventional meaning" (Eckert 2005:24) which is "vivified" or given greater specificity in the situated case of their use.[8] Fourth, by pressing these meaning-laden resources into our service, we further sediment older meaning potentials and possibly create new ones.

In talking about the way speakers draw on elements of style "out there" in the social world, recontextualizing them at the local level, we thus arrive at a process essential to Eckert's theory of style, namely, bricolage (Eckert 2000, 2005). Drawing on the work of Dick Hebdige (1979), Eckert employs this concept to theorize how styles are produced, reproduced, and reshaped. She proposes that

[8] See Podesva 2008 for a discussion.

> stylistic practice involves a process of bricolage (Hebdige, 1984), by which people combine a range of existing resources to construct new meanings or new twists on old meanings. It involves adapting linguistic variables available out in the larger world to the construction of social meaning on a local level (Eckert 2005:24)

Though Eckert's focus here is primarily on the place of linguistic variation in this process, the notion of bricolage – as it is conceptualized by Hebdige (1979), as well as Eckert (2000, 2005) and her students (Mendoza-Denton 1999, 2008; Zhang (2008)) – seeks to make sense of semiotic differentiation across a range of modalities, including, but not limited to, language. Key here is the idea that social actors employ, at the local level, a stylistic resource which is in some degree of wider circulation and which has some conventionalized or normative associations. It is in this respect that style is ultimately an intertextual phenomenon, involving practices and material drawn not from a vaccuum but rather from various channels – local and global – of social circulation.

In the subcultural literature associated with what has been called the CCCS approach, as well as in the "post-subcultural" literature, authors have employed the construct of bricolage to explain how subjects adapt materials – for example, widely-circulated commodities such as t-shirts (Brown 2007) or makeup (Mendoza-Denton 2008) – in the process of developing a group style, "where style acts to form a collective identity" (Piano 2003:256). Eckert and her students have advanced an approach along these lines as well, examining how social groups adapt not only elements of material

culture, but also elements of language, to construct a collective position in the social landscape (Eckert 2000, Mendoza-Denton 1999, 2008). For example, in her work on adolescent social life in suburban Detroit high schools, Eckert (2000) demonstrates the role that elements of material culture play in symbolically highlighting the polarization between "jocks" and "burnouts," a polarity which dominates the social scene. As Eckert observes, Burnouts, who take an anti-school pro-Detroit position, make use of urban symbols to forge a collective style and identity distinct from that of the jocks:

> The burnouts' urban orientation emerges in the use of symbols of street smarts such as wallet chains and symbols of urban affiliation such as Detroit jackets and auto factory jackets. Their claim to engagement in the realities of life outside of school shows up in symbols of toughness (e.g., leather jackets, wristbands or boots with studs) and in dark-colored clothing. (Eckert 2004:47).

Important from a sociolinguistic perspective is how burnouts use elements of material culture in tandem with linguistic variants for the purposes of collective identification and the production of distinction in the local political and symbolic economies. As Eckert notes, "There is a seamless relation between these visual symbols and the burnouts' use of urban variants of the late stages of the Northern Cities shift," providing evidence for the claim that "[l]anguage is part of a broader semiotic system that includes such things as clothing, territory, musical taste, activities, and stances." (Eckert 2004:47). Norma Mendoza-Denton (1999, 2008) has produced similar findings, noting that, in her study of adolescent Latina gang members, "fine distinctions in social

networks and gang membership were associated with differences in the use of makeup and clothing, and correlated with the variable use of morphophonologically salient, high-frequency discourse markers." (Mendoza-Denton 1999:240). Continuing, she suggests that

> [l]ike any other social actors, these adolescent girls simultaneously draw from the linguistic and extralinguistic realms for bricolage, fashioning styles that are not only linguistically identifiable and socially named, but also embodied, symbolically coherent and aesthetically unified. (Mendoza-Denton 1999:240)

In both Eckert's and Mendoza-Denton's research, then, we see examples of social actors making use of more 'global' resources, be they sociolinguistic variants or (other) elements of material culture, at a local level, at the level of interaction and performance, to articulate their positions as participants in various communities of practice.

Here we reach another point of departure from traditional approaches to style, this time in terms of the level of social organization examined. Eckert and Mendoza-Denton, as well as like-minded researchers (Bucholtz 1997, 1999), seek to connect the global to the local, the macro and micro, by examining how people negotiate, deploy, and utlimately conventionalize the use of stylistic resources through their participation in various communities of practice. As Eckert (2000, 2004) argues, it is through our participation in communities of practice that we construct styles and develop a "shared take" (Eckert 2004:42) on our place – and the place of others – in the social landscape. Eckert argues that

> Every speaker participates in a variety of communities of practice, or collections of people who engage together in a particular enterprise—a garage band, a family, a gang, a car pool, an office. The community looks out jointly on the social landscape, interpreting the landscape, and constructing their place and stance within that landscape. And individuals' place in the community is closely related to their participation in that process of construction. (Eckert 2004:44)

Integral here is the idea that the social meaning potentials of global stylistic resources get worked out in part through our participation and situated performances in the communities of practice to which we belong. Central to this process, Eckert argues,

> is the social characterization and evaluation of people and groups out in [...the social] landscape, and of their stylistic practices. It is in this process of meaning-making that speakers assign meaning to stylistic resources and assess them as potential resources for their own stylistic moves. (Eckert 2004:44)

As this line of reasoning suggests, communities of practice prove central to the sedimentation of styles and the social meaning potentials associated with stylistic practices. Focal to this position is the prominence of communities of practice in the social world, particularly in contexts of contact and conflict, where oppositions become salient to the point of reification through labeling. Such is precisely the case in much of the research on subcultures and youth cultures, where participation in one community of practice – such as a gang (Mendoza-Denton 1997, 2008) or rave culture (Thornton 1995)

– puts the social actor at odds with other social groups, be they more immediate (i.e. other communities of practice) or abstract (as in the debated "mainstream" versus "subculture" dynamic) in nature. In either case, through participating in a community of practice, social actors "come to develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values – in short, practices – as a function of their joint engagement in activity." (Eckert 2000:35) It is through these processes of joint activity that communities of practice develop group styles and gain prominence in a social scene, setting themselves apart from "others" and cultivating a sense of distinction, of collective identity, which in turn provides individuals with resources for cultivating their own personal identities (Eckert 2000:35, cf. Irvine 2001 on the Nobles and Griots dynamic in Wolof).

Herein lies the potency of the community of practice for a sociolinguistic focus on identity and self-presentation. In the kinds of situations described above, communities of practice play some part in the parceling out of social reality. They, along with the styles which constitute them, stand out as meaningful places in the social landscape, sometimes to the extent that we reifiy them – that is, the groups and their distinctive styles – through essentializing practices such as labeling (Eckert 2000; cf. Agha 2005 regarding his notion of "metapragmatic typification").[9] Through processes of self- and other-directed evaluation, we come to develop models of our social worlds in which communities of practice – as well as iconic representatives of these communities – constitute meaningful spots on the sociocultural map. Moreover, the styles associated with these communties and icons, their beliefs and orientations, provide us – individuals – with resources for

[9] This needn't always be the case though. As Eckert suggests, there are many styles for which we have no name, but which nonetheless serve as resources for self-presentation.

positioning ourselves relative to the social formations on our conceptual maps of the social world.

Key here is that our ability to position ourselves socially, through stylistic acts, depends on our understanding of how places on the sociocultural map relate to one another as a system of possibilities, underwritten by a partially-shared knowledge of what styles do exist, and in which ways they are distinctive from each other. In regard to communities of practice, this social knowledge involves an understanding of the oppositional dynamics or, as Irvine terms them, "principles of differentiation," (Irvine 2001) which these communities embody, and which ultimately give meaning to style. It is to a discussion of these principles and the mediating forces they exercise that we now turn.

2.1.3 Judith Irvine: Principles of Differentiation and Ideological Mediation

Just as in the position advanced by Eckert and her students, Irvine's (1985, 2001) approach to style centers around the idea that stylistic practice is fundamentally about difference, about the production of "distinction" (Irvine 2001). And this distinction, as well as the potential it holds for social actors, "makes sense" only insofar as we take into consideration the relationships between different styles as systems of "distinctions and possibilities." (Irvine 2001:24). In this way then, Irvine's focus on styles rests on the forces which give rise to related styles and stylistic differentiation. As she argues, "the characteristics of a particular style cannot be explained independently of others. Instead, attention must be directed to relationships among styles – to their contrasts, boundaries, and commonalities." (Irvine 2001:22) Her interests, then, primarily lie not in correlating

a particular linguistic usage with social fact, but rather in identifying and describing "the principles of differentiation organizing the relationships and distinctiveness of varieties – principles [...she seeks] to capture in a conception of 'style'." (Irvine 2001:28) Before examining how Irvine conceptualizes these principles, though, we first must consider what Irvine takes style to be.

As she herself notes (Irvine 2001: 23), Irvine draws on the influential conceptions of style found in the works of Hebdige (1979) and Bourdieu (1984) in forging her own take on the subject. For example, Irvine's approach to style reflects in part the spirit of Hebdige's work in which he traces the historical relations among post-war British subcultures and their respective styles. Irvine (2001:23) points out that

> "Style" in this work is broadly conceived: a subculture's 'style' is something distinctive that appears in its members' dress, posture, argot, musical preferences, even in their focal concerns. "Style" crosscuts these communicative and behavioral modalities and integrates them thematically."

Thus, for Irvine, as for the approach associated with Eckert and the Stanford tradition, we have a "broad conception of style as a social semiosis of distinctiveness," (Irvine 2001:23) which crosscuts modalities of signification, including the use of language and elements of material culture. Style, from this perspective, is a constantly in-flux constellation of social practices which embodies and communicates the group's "focal concerns" (Irvine 2001:23). Moreover, style, or rather a particular style, becomes meaningful only in relation to other stylistic possibilities.

Citing Hebdige, Irvine notes: "styles that distinguish...subcultures cannot be understood in isolation from one another; they have a complex history of 'dialectal interplay' (p.57), drawing on portions of each other's symbolic resources while constructing contrast in other portions." (Irvine 2001:23) So to understand what social actors do with style, we must understand what and *how* style can "mean", and to do so requires tracing the laying down of a social history by which stylistic acts and materials aqcuire particular meaning potentials. For Irvine, as for Hebdige, this means examining relationships among and within styles.

These relationships, as Irvine proposes, "are ideologically mediated." (Irvine 2001:22). Taking this position, Irvine foregrounds the role of language ideology in the study of style. On this view, the way we conceptualize the place of particular styles is mediated by "positioned", partially-shared, value-laden models of the relationships between stylistic practices – both linguistic and nonlinguistic – and social organization. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Irvine (Irvine 2001:24) proposes that speakers' stylistic acts "join in the 'work of representation,'" linking style with salient social groups, icons, and situations. In this way, style is evokative of a range of interlinked cultural phenomena, not simply "context" or "social group," as in the traditional usage of terms such as register or dialect, respectively (Irvine 2001:25-28). By contrast, Irvine's wider conception of style encompasses both these terms, capturing the fact that social and individual or situational variation are intimately connected (cf. Labov's classic sociolinguistic finding, described above).

In these ways then, Irvine's broad conception of style brings to the fore the ideological dimension of style. Stylistic moves are indexical, as Irvine (2001) argues, and

thus mean something to the people who employ them and evaluate such moves. For style to do its work, then, speaker and hearer must "understand" it, and as Irvine (2001:22) argues, "[t]hose understandings are positioned, depending in some measure on the participant's social position and point of view." It is for these reasons that Irvine proposes to use the term "ideological" in describing style, as our schemata for understanding sociolinguistic acts depend in large part on our own social positions and interests. Irvine (2001:24) argues:

> The reason for calling participants' assumptions and analyses "ideologies" is that ideational schemes, whether about language or other things, have some relationship with point of view – the social position of the viewer, and the practices to which he/she differentially has access – and the viewer's baggage of history and partiality.

We thus end up with a view of style as socially meaningful, though in a partial, fragmented way, vis-à-vis the salient social formations to which speakers belong and orient.

Expanding on these observations, Irvine (2001:23-24) proposes that "...styles in speaking involve the ways speakers, as agents in social (and sociolinguistic) space, negotiate their positions and goals within a system of distinctions and possibilities." Underpinning these systems of "distinctions and possibiltities" are "principles of differentiation," a concept Irvine borrows from Bourdieu (1985:204). These principles derive in large part from salient social oppositions, such as the Jock / Burnout dyanmic we saw earlier in Eckert's research, in which an axis of pro- versus anti-school

positionality provided one foundation for social opposition. As Irvine argues, the principles of differentiation for a given community revolve around evaluative or positional axes, like "refined" and "coarse" in the Javanese example she discusses. (Irvine 2001:29-30) These axes characterize both salient, polarized social groups, as well as the speech associated with such groups, or rather, with the cultural images and voices of those groups.

Worthy of note are the terms "images" and "voices," where the use of "voices" seeks to capture the linguistic dimension of the shared cultural images – that is, ideologized representations – people have of a social group, a result of the process of iconization, as Irvine goes on to describe. Key here is the position Irvine takes in arguing that axes of differentiation, denoted through the "metapragmatic signs" (Agha 2007) corresponding to 'refined' and 'coarse' in Javanese, characterize language varieties associated with people, with situations, with perceived dispositions, and so on, such that one can use a particular variety to take a stance assoicated with a group image, even though that person is not part of the group.

Thus, we observe the effects of iconization through the mapping of social distinction onto language varieties associated with various dimensions of social life, including subject positions, social relations, personae, and the dispositions of salient personae. Central to this process of iconization is the salience of social oppositions and the evaluation of these oppositions in terms of principles of differentiation, principles which reify the oppositions through attributive axes such as "coarse" and "fine," corresponding not only with the social groups such terms describe, but also with the

styles associated with these groups and the situations in which group members frequently participate.

Thus, in examining the approach to style taken by Irvine, we appreciate the role of language ideology and ideological processes, such as iconization, in construing the relations between social groups, situations, dispositions, qualities and, ulitmately, the styles which evoke and embody this range of cultural phenomena. These relations are captured by Irvine's use of the term "princples of differentation," axes which derive in large part from salient social oppositions in a particular community. Salient social variation – and the stylistic differentiation which not only reflects it, but also which serves to constitute such social difference – provide meaningful material and practices for individual performances of identity. Irvine (2001:31) describes just this in the case of the Javanese elite and peasantry, noting that individual identity work has to do with

> ...the cultural structuring, and consequent creative deployment, of "voices" associated with social groups such as the Javanese elite and peasantry. Images of persons considered typical of those groups - and the personalities, moods, behavior, activities, and settings, characteristically associated with them - are rationalized and organized in a cultural/ideological system, so that those images become available as a frame of reference within which speakers create performnaces and within which audiences interpret them...To put this another way: one of the many methods people have for differentiating situations and displaying attitudes is to draw on (or carefully avoid) the "voices" of others, or what they assume those voices to be.

Thus, from Irvine – as well as from Eckert – we get some sense of how individual "acts of identity" (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985) exert socially meaningful force, through their direct and indirect associations with prominent social oppositions in a given social scene. We see a similar line of reasoning in the approach of Nikolas Coupland, described in the following section.

2.1.4 Nikolas Coupland: Persona Management and the Relational Self

As with the previous two authors discussed, Coupland (2001) takes a position which focuses in part on how we, as social actors, interpret and evaluatate social and linguistic variation in the broader context of our social realities, subsequently putting to use the knowledge which arises through these processes of evaluation to fashion selves. The models we develop connect a range of cultural phenomena to Coupland's (2001) concept of "dialect style," a significant construct in his work that captures the ways in which varieties co-vary simultaneously with social variables such as place, situation, and personae. Though a familiar concept in the terrain of sociolinguistic research, Coupland conceives of dialect in arguably far-wider terms than previous researchers. As he notes, "The general sociolinguistic term used to refer to ways of speaking that are indexically linked to social groups, times and places is dialects. Dialects are social styles." (Coupland 2007:2)

What's significant about this statement is the way in which Coupland terminologically equates dialect with the notion of "social style." In doing so, he brings the concept of dialect into the current theoretical converstation about the role of style in constructing social meaning and, ultimatley, positioning speakers relative to social

formations associated with symbolic repertoires such as dialects or "dialect styles" (Coupland 2001). Central to Coupland's theorizing of dialect style is the role of agency in its deployment to craft personae. Styles are thus viewed as integral resources for doing identity work, or, as Coupland (2001:197) terms it, "persona management": "Dialect style as persona management captures how individuals, within and across speaking situations, manipulate the conventionalized social meanings of dialect varieties—the individual through the social." (Coupland 2001:198). "Style," Coupland argues, "and in particular dialect style, can therefore be construed as a special case of the presentation of self, within particular relational contexts – articulating relational goals and identity goals." (Coupland 2001:197).

As these preceding passages suggest, style does its work in part by virtue of the meaning potentials it evokes, a theme we touched on earlier in §2.2. In discussing the social meaning of style, Coupland (2007) makes use of the concept of genre, ultimately drawing a parallel between his conception of style and the more general use of genre in sociolinguistics. Genres, as Coupland (2007:15) notes, are commonly conceived of as

> culturally recognised, patterned ways of speaking, or structured cognitive frameworks for engaging in discourse...People recognise these genres when they come across them, and they can refer to them through fairly simple labels; they appreciate their norms and their discursive demands on people taking part. Once again, this fits into a general definition of social styles.

In laying out a relationship between genre and style, Coupland foregrounds several qualities integral to both, including regularity of structure or use, recognizability, and normativity. Indeed, as other scholars have noted (Irvine 2001:22), "consistency" or regularity is central to maintaining the "locally relevant principles of value" which in part "motivate the consistency of stylistic forms." (Irvine 2001:23). It is in referring to such "principles of value" vis-à-vis genre that we touch upon the ideological, normative dimensions of style in Coupland's work. As the long passage above proposes, social actors orient to genres as "frameworks," whose "norms" and "demands" we appreciate. Styles, or rather the act of "styling" (Coupland 2007) by drawing on generic features, functions to reproduce or subvert genres and their associated social resonances, i.e. their norms. As Coupland (2007:16) notes, "[s]tyling is part of the process of genre-making, but also part of the process of genre-breaking. Styling can reshape conventional speech genres and how we expect to participate in them."

Drawing on Bauman's work on performance (1975, 1990, 2001), Coupland examines how social actors exploit metalinguistic awareness in both "mundane" and "high performances" (Coupland 2007:146) to project identities and, crucial to our present concerns, to challenge dominant scripts of social life including femininity/masculinity, ethnic authenticity, or place identity. Coupland draws on Bakhtin's (1981) influential conception of "stylisation" to emphasize the subversive dimension of voicing "others" to challenge social relations: "Bakhtinian stylisation is...a subversive form of multi-voiced utterance, one that discredits hegemonic, monologic discourses by appropriating the voices of the powerful, and reworking them for new purposes." (Coupland 2007:149-150) Such is exactly the case in parody, where adopting a style which is not

straighforwardly our own allows us to indirectly and directly comment on this style, interrogating the naturalness of the connection between a particular style and hegemonic social constructs such as "blackness" or "heteronormativity" (see for example Barrett 1999, Chun 2004, Coupland 2007, Sclafani 2009). It is this potential that style holds to challenge dominant discourses that we will return to in later chapters.

2.5 Interim Summary

In this section we have examined the views of style taken by three influential theorists on the subject: Penelope Eckert, Judith Irvine, and Nikolas Coupland. Common to each of these authors is a perspective in which individuals play the role not of the "cultural dope" (Giddens 1979, cited in Eckert 2000), but rather as social agents, manipulating the sociolinguistic structures which both constrain and enable their performances of personae. For each theorist discussed above, we see a position adopted in which variation at the social level, that is, variation among salient social formations, provides material for stancetaking and performances of identity at the individual level. These social formations and their iconic representatives become reified through essentializing processes, and as Eckert (2001:123) notes, they

> ...then turn around and serve as resources for other styles—for those who may want to incorporate in their own style a bit of what they see as attractive, intersting, or striking about New York Jews or Valley Girls. In this way, group style stands at a level of sociolinguistic practice that allows us to examine the production and reproduction of social meaning in variation

This quote highlights another perspective shared by each theorists considered above, namely, that language use constitutes a social practice, on par with other social-semiotic practices (Eckert 2000, Irvine 2001). This view is summed up in the following quote by Gal (1989:347), which serves to introduce the first topic in the next section, style as practice:

> The fundamental insight of Austin, Kenneth Burke, and Jakobson – that speaking is an act – locates talk on a par with other activities, and not simply as a reflection or comment on them. Thus, the contextual surround came to be seen not only as a constraint on speaking, but also as, in part, produced by talk.

2.2 Themes Central to Theorizing Style

2.2.1 Style as Practice

The "Practice Turn," (Cetina et al 2001) as it has been dubbed in social theory (broadly conceived), made its way into the sociolinguistic literature through the research carried out by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) on the articulation of gender in and through communities of practice. Since this pioneering work, practice-based approaches have abounded (see Bucholtz 1999), gaining momentum in the field as an alternative to the previous structural-based approaches on which modern sociolinguistics was built (Eckert 2000).

In this section, I examine two facets of practice-based approaches to linguistic variation which bear significantly on the present study, namely, the social constructivist perspective taken in practice-based studies and the focus on linguistic variation as one of

many interlinked social practices which possess similar cultural resonances. Before turning to this discussion, I first briefly describe the nature and significance of the practice turn in sociolinguistics, focusing on a topic central to the epistemological base of any paradigm: the nature and basis of explanation.

As Romaine (1996) lays out in detail, the structural basis for explanation in sociolinguistics has an intellectual history reaching back to Saussure. But more significant to our current purposes are the social models of society drawn on to explain linguistic variation, specifically, the structural-functional models of mid-century social science. It is these models that Labov – and later variationists – implicitly and explicitly drew on in seeking explanations for the structured heterogeneity in the communities they studied. As Romaine (1996) notes, these approaches looked for explanations in stastically-significant distributions at the level of the group, the communal. On this view, structured variation is viewed as a function of group or network membership (Romaine 1996:105). Explantion from this perspective foregrounds the structure side of the structure-agency dualism in social theory, backgrounding the role speakers potentially play as agents in producing and reproducing the variable structures which sociolinguists study.

One remnant of the structuralist legacy in sociolinguistics is the methodological practice of taking certain domains of social organization – such as gender, class, and ethnicity – as pre-defined points of departure, what Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:465) have referred to as dimensions of one's "social address," or place in the social structure. From this perspective, which Eckert (2000:3) terms "a theory of variation as structure," the correlation of language differences with group memberships provides

explanation for variation. However, as Romaine points out, citing Lass (1980: 166-7), correlations between groups and language variation are "non-causal, and therefore, non-explanatory..." It is these types of explanations, however, that Eckert (2005:2) notes "first wave" variationist approaches appealed to in searching for answers to questions regarding the causes underlying linguistic heterogeneity.

By contrast, in what Eckert has dubbed "second wave" and "third wave" sociolinguistic studies, researchers have turned to ethnographic methods to uncover the "local dynamics" (Eckert 2005:5) which undergird sociolinguistic variation. What these broad range of scholars have in common is a social-constructivist focus on speaker agency and the role of social practice in constructing the social categories variationist sociolinguists employ to draw correlational conclusions. This approach marks a significant departure from what had been common practice among sociolinguists, namely, to begin with macrosocial categories and examine how these forms of social organization correlate with – and potentially explain – linguistic variation. Instead, social-constructivist oriented researchers undertook their task from the bottom-up, according speakers some measure of agency in constructing their positions in the social landscape (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, Eckert 2000, 2004, Johnstone 2004, Mendoza-Denton 2007, Schilling-Estes 2003 *inter alios*). In this shift we recognize the general trend in social science from reflectionist to constructivist views of the relationship between society and social organization, on the one hand, and cultural production, on the other.

We also see a change in the focus on groups to an interest in the individual as social agent and meaning maker (Eckert 2000:44, Johnstone 1996, 2009). Again, this

shift revolves around the agency accorded invididuals as social actors, as well as the potential for linguistic variation to function in a socially meaningful way, contributing to the ramping-up of sedimenting practices to the reifications we recognize as social formations. As Eckert (2000:169) notes, "[c]ategories reify the polarization of practice. They are constituted by those practices... [and] they also foreground them." So we end up with an approach which begins not with pre-defined social categories, but which seeks instead to discover what categories and practices are relevant to the speakers under study.

We also end up with an approach which, as Gal notes in the quote preceding this section, examines linguistic variation as part of a wider system of social practices involved in semiotic differentiation, including the deployment and manipulation of material cultural objects. Central here is the notion of style developed by Eckert and her students, which expands the traditional notion of style in sociolinguistics to include other modes of signification (Eckert 1996, 2000, Mendoza-Denton 2008). These different modes are interlinked meaningfully through their deployment in tandem to create distinction. It is in this way that signifiying practices, including "vowels and nail polish," (as the famous Eckert 1996 paper is titled) crystallize as holistic systems of and for differentiation. Here is the point at which the linguistic and non-linguistic articulate, as Eckert (1996:8) proposes in her description of the place of style in the development of a "flamboyant" feminine youth style:

> The transition into a heterosexual social order brings boys and girls into mutual and conscious engagement in gender differentiation, in the course of which girls move into the elaboration of flamboyantly stylized selves. The development of flamboyant linguistic style is a key part of this

> elaboration, and inseparable from the emerging use of other aspects of gendered style such as nail polish, lip gloss, hair style, clothing, and new walks. These stylistic endeavors are inseparable from the construction of meaning for the community of practice, and from the construction of an identity for the individual as a participant in that community.

Key here is the sedimentation of stylistic acts through time, the continual deployment of co-occurring signs leading them to "hang together" (Coupland 2007) in a gestalt-like way, functioning as future resource – and constraint – in the procesesses of self-presentation. This sedimentation underlies the production of style, and depends on a number of factors, including repetition, recognition, and utlimately, entextualization (Urban 1996), the process through which a "multi-channel text" (Agha 2007:24) becomes detached from its original context and serves as a meaningful resource through recontextualization. It is in these processes that we appreciate the intertextual basis of style, a theme to which we will return in later sections.

Also central to Eckert's passage above are the processes by which individuals in a community of practice come together to jointly develop a group style. These processes of distinction ultimately work to configure the stylistic boundaries of the social formation, setting it apart as socially distinct from other communities of practice. In developing a joint style, members of the community construct a joint repertoire of signifying practices which embody what it means to participate in this community – as a jock, or a burnout, or a Houston rapper, for example. In this way, style is central to social boundary construction and distinction, themes examined in the next section.

2.2.1 Style as Distinction and Boundary Construction

In §2.3 we examined the centrality of distinctiveness in Judith Irvine's conception of style. And as we saw, the approach taken by Eckert and her students shares this foregrounding of distinction in conceptualizing stylistic practice. As Irvine states (Irvine 2001:31), style is ultimately about "processes of distinction," processes of sociocultural differentiation. The stylistic moves we make serve to distinguish us, as participants in various communities of practice, from other people, other "types" of people. Indeed, it is through our stylistic moves that we configure the social boundaries which render "us" as similar, on the one hand, and distinct from others, on the other hand.

In their pioneering work on language and identity, Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005) describe two tactics which center around the the production of difference and sameness, namely, "adequation" and "distinction," one pair of their "tactics of intersubjectivity." The authors propose these strategies to capture "the relational dimension of identity categories, practices, and ideologies." In other words, adequation and distinction constitute relational tactics, ways for social actors to align or disalign themselves with social formations, ideological positions, and so on.

As Bucholtz and Hall (2004:383, original emphasis) note, "the first of these [terms], *adequation*, involves the pursuit of socially recognized sameness. In this relation, potentially salient differences are set aside in favor of perceived or asserted similarities..." Important to note here is the processual perspective taken by Bucholtz and Hall. The authors propose adequation as a process to produce likeness, not as "an objective permanent state but a motivated social achievement that may have temporary or long-term effects." (Bucholtz and Hall 2004:383)

One of these effects, as the authors note, is to collapse social boundaries in order to promote likeness or sameness, that is, in order to identify with other social actors despite differences separating them. Important to our purposes is the potential adequation holds for manipulating boundaries, especially stylistic boundaries. For example, in the highly-regionalized cultural field of Hip Hop music, rappers from various Southern states often employ the trope "quit hatin' the South" to project a unified Southern identity which contrasts with Midwestern, West Coast and East Coast identities and styles. Artists employ this trope while simultaneously playing up the distinctiveness of Southern Hip Hop style, despite the immeasurable hetereogeneity and diversity among local Hip Hop styles and scenes in the American South.

In this example we see the complement to adequation, distinction, deployed to distinguish Southern rappers from their competitors in the national symbolic and financial economies of regionalized Hip Hop cultural production. Bucholtz and Hall (2004:384) define distinction as "the mechanism whereby salient difference is produced. Distinction," they continue, "is therefore the converse of adequation, in that in this relation difference is underscored rather than erased." In the trope described above, artists evoke a discourse of place which simultaneously erases the social boundaries separating Southern scenes while underscoring the differences – stylistic and otherwise – between Southern rap music and the scenes associated with other regions. The two relational processes described by Bucholtz and Hall thus hold the potential to configure simultaneously different orders of relations, likeness and difference, whilst configuring social centers and margins, relations central to social processes of collective identification and the production of solidarity.

The notion of solidarity, conceptually akin to adequation, has factored centrally in many accounts of language use in cases of conflict, including situations where vernacular usage stands in opposition to an institutionally-sanctioned standard (Gal 1989:354), or in cases where social groups in conflict draw on the symbolic potential of linguistic and non-linguistic style to collectively identify in the face of social opppostion (Alim 2003, Bell 2001, Coupland 2001, Eckert 2000, Hodkinson 2002, 2003, Mendoza-Denton 1997, 2008, Morgan 2002, Piano 2003, Zhang 2008 *inter alios*). In such cases, styles and stylistic practices play a crucial role in positioning social actors as collectively oriented – jointly engaged in producing a shared group image, often in contrast with some other group or groups.

The work of Paul Hodkinson (2002, 2003) on Goth subculture provides an example from the postsubcultural literature of how one social formation employs style to collectively identfy as participants in a subulculture. Interesting to our purposes is the role that forms of media – in Hodkinson's study the internet – play in shaping the stylistic boundaries of group styles and collective identities. Hodkinson cites a specific website, called "Darkwave," as particularly influential in this respect. He notes that

> Darkwave and many of the sites it linked to, served to construct the distinctive values and tastes of the subculture. In so doing, they helped prevent possible excessive growth in the breadth of intepretations from leading to the complete breakup of goth. Construction of stylistic boundaries on the Web took place in various ways, from the photographs individuals posted of themselves on homepages to the kinds of music recommended by e-zines, to the definitions of goth offered by those who

> produced and maintained high-profile 'frequently asked questions' sites about the subculture...The fact that such resources were liable to be accessed by a translocal audience meant that they played a particular role in maintaining the consistency of the distinctive goth style from place to place. (Hodkinson 2003:295).

In this passage we see the role that the media in various forms play in mediating subcultural self-images and collective identification, as well as in circulating these images and constructing stylistic boundaries. We also note another theme important to the present work, namely, the active role that subcultural participants play in policing the boundaries – stylistic and otherwise – of particular social formations and subjectivities. In the next section I briefly discuss examples of these processes, including their local and global dimensions.

2.2.2 Policing the Boundaries

We have already seen an example of boundary construction and maintenance in Hodkinson's (2002, 2003) Goth research. As I show in later chapters, Hip Hop music and media provide fertile ground for examining how social actors take an active role in shaping and interrogating – through globaly-circulated media – the stylistic boundaries of very local subjectivities. These boundaries may include facets of social life including ethnic identification, spatial affiliation, gender, and ideological positions of various sorts. When we talk about stylistic boundaries, we bring authenticity[10], and the processes by which authenticity is produced, into focus. Policing the boundaries of a subjectivity or

[10] I talk more about authenticity in later sections.

subcultural formation contributes to the production of "authentcity effects," (Bucholtz 2003:408) that is, the propogation of ideas regarding what it means to be a certain "type" of person or a participant in a particular community of practice.

Hodkinson's (2002, 2003) research illustrates how social actors in positions of power and access can circulate their take on what it means to be Goth, for example, through the frequently asked questions section of the Darkwave website. The policing of social-stylistic boundaries may take place on a much more local scale though. For instance, MCs often police social-semiotic boundaries in the course of a live hip hop performance. In one such case, Morgan (2002) describes a local Los Angeles artist rapping "on the mic," freestyling (i.e. rapping improvisionally), who calls attention to someone exiting the venue "wearing a tee shirt with the name of the California rap group Pharcyde...and a cap with a B on it representing Boston." Morgan points out that this potentially non-homologous fit along the dimsension of spatial orientation occasions direct confrontation and interrogation from the artist on the mic:

1 Rap in California?

2 You be down with the Pharcyde?

3 Over on the far side?

4 Down with the West Side. (Morgan 2002:116, citing the artist Terra)

Here we have an example where a subculturalist highlights one dimension of subcultural participation – spatial orientiation – and emphasizes its significance by calling into question the regional affiliation of another subculturalist. In this case the

basis for interrogating a spatialized subcultural allegiance is the co-occurrence of signs, producing a potentially incongruent text-level indexical effect (Agha 2007). In addition to the place of material culture in policing social boundaries, linguistic style also plays a key role in the process of boundary making and breaking. For example, in Johnstone and her colleague's work on Pittsburghese (Johnstone et al 2006), widely-circulated representations of local speech, connected overtly with a discourse of Pittsburgh indigineity, functions to shape the boundaries of a linguistic nativeness in this social context.

In another case, Shenk (2007) discusses an example where a group of friends invoke and ultimately reproduce an ideology of "Mexicanness," which includes "pure blood, birthplace, and language fluency." (214) Important to bear in mind is that these prerequisites for laying claim to an authentic Mexican identity are not fixed, but intertextually made and remade through the policing of discourse by social interactants. Key to a sociolinguistic take on this shaping and sedimenting of ideological boundaries is the way the friend group Shenk describes negotiates which friends are central or peripheral vis-à-vis "Mexicanness" by appealing to linguistic fluency in Spanish. As the author suggests, "Spanish linguistic performance is heavily monitored," with "the occurrence of a language error...consistently attributed to a lack of communicative competence and interpreted as a sign of cultural inadequacy and inauthenticity." (Shenk 2007:201)

Thus we observe the role of language in configuring the boundaries of a socially-constructed discourse of authenticity, which may be invoked to assert symbolic power in the form of authenticating moves. In this way, policing the boundaries of a social

formation and its style creates an opportunity for those who cut a different figure altogether – i.e. social actors marginalized by the kinds of authenticating moves described above – to contest and symbolically resist the discursive imposition of language ideological boundaries. As Gal (1989:348) notes,

> The capacity of language to denote, to represent the world, is not considered transparent and innocent, as in many anthropological accounts of worldview, but is fundamentally implicated in relations of domination. Whether the term is hegemony, symbolic domination, oppositional culture, subjugated discourse, or heteroglossia, the central insight remains: Control of the representations of reality is not only a source of social power but therefore also a likely locus of conflict and struggle.

In the next section I examine the potential style holds for social actors to resist "regimes of representation," (Hall 1997) carving out their own places in the social landscape.

2.3 Style as Resistance

2.3.1 The CCCS approach and Stylistic Resistance

As numerous authors have acknowledeged in the cultural studies literature (Hodkinson 2002, 2003, Stahl 2003, Weinzierl & Muggleton 2003, *inter alios*), the work associated with the Centre for Conetmporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham paved the way for examining the symbolic and political role of style in resisting and subverting so-called "mainstream" cultural forms and norms. The influential work of Dick Hebdige (1979), for example, set out to examine the ways post-war British subcultures

appropriated mundane semiotic materials – such as safety pins in the case of the punk culture - and transformed them through the juxtaposition of stylistic acts and oppositional ideological posturing.

Hebdige interpreted these stylistc acts as "semiotic warfare," "symbolic challenges" (1979:96) through which subculturalists resisted the naturalized norms of mainstream culture by establishing their own order of norms and social relations. As Hodkinson (2007:4) notes, "The interpretations of the CCCS theorists were not uniform, but the prevailing view was that...subcultures represented an enactment of stylistic resistance; a subversive reaction by young people to a contradictory situation in respect of both age and class."

Undergirding much of the work the CCCS approach and those influenced by it is the idea that subculturalists and the forces of mainstream culture, including instutions such as the media and the schools, play a role in constructing a "mainstream" versus "underground" or "subterrenean" dynamic. This relationship is characterized by the subculturalist's rejection of mainstream norms, as evidenced by the spectacular, transgressive styles associated with subcultures. Style from this perspective is viewed as the symbolic means by which subculturalists positively assert collective identities opposed to the normative subjectivities associated with mainstream culture and its institutions of replication.

Important here is a bi-directional process of essentialization, by which the media constructs subculturalists as homogenous "folk devils" (Bucholtz 2002, Forman 1997), and subculturalists construct an undifferentiated mainstream "other" against which they, in part, define themsleves. This dynamic plays out in some measure throgh the give and

take of everyday life, but it also results from the analytic practices of researchers who examine the place and qualities of subcultural formations. At issue here is the potential mariginalization – through everyday practice as well as analytic practice – of subculturalists who don't fit a particular mold, that is, who exist at the margins of spectacular subculture. As some scholars have noted (Hodkinson 2007, Piano 2003), research on subculture has historically tended to focus on resistance in terms of a monolithic subculture rejecting the norms of a monolothic mainstream. Citing Clarke (1981), Hodkinson (2007:7) notes that

> rather than studying the variety of responses of marginalized youth to their apparently contradictory social position, the CCCS took as their starting point the response of the most stylistically spectacular youth—or 'card carrying' subcultural members—and the proceeded to read off class, youth and other factors as the explanation.

Hodkinson (2007:7) notes that, as a consequence, "the motivations, practices and social backgrounds of subcultural participants were essentialized, while both non-subcultural youth and so called 'part-timers' were either excluded from the analysis or dismissed as dupes of the culture industry." Through these processes of esentialization, analysts have singled out certain subculturalists out as more "authentic" than others, thus failing to capture the richly-diverse range of resistance mounted by various youth cultural formations, spectacular or otherwise.

2.3.2 Stylistic Resistance in Sociolinguistics

Expanding on the work of the CCCS approach, sociolinguists such as Bucholtz (1999), Eckert (2000), and Mendoza-Denton (2008) have sought to examine the subversive potential of style, while taking into consideration the boundaries – the centers and margins – constructed by both researcher and researched. For instance, in her seminal work on jocks and burnouts, Eckert (1989, 2000) spends a considerable amount of time discussing "in-betweens," students who either do not participate in jock or burnout communities of practice, or who marginally participate in either or both of these communities. As Eckert shows, what matters most in the sites she studied wasn't group membership *per se*, but rather participation in practices associated with groups, such as "cruising," wearing "dark eyeliner", and "using tense front vowels" (Eckert 2000:1). In this way, Eckert underscores the "positive identity practices" (Bucholtz 1999:211) – including the use of phonetic variation – utilized by students marginalized by the dominant jock/burnout dynamic.

Along similar lines, Bucholtz' (1999) study of "nerd girls" looks at the active construction of a collective identity which contrasts with youth cultures striving for "coolness". In comparing the nerd girls with the jocks and burnouts of Eckert's study, Bucholtz notes that

> Not all high-school students...share the Jocks' and Burnouts' preoccupation with coolness. A third group, the nerds, defines itself largely in opposition to "cool" students – whether Jocks, Burnouts, or any other social identity. Nerds stand as the antithesis of all these groups, a

> situation that Eckert succinctly captures in her observation, "If a Jock is the opposite of a Burnout, a nerd is the opposite of both" (1989:48).

Importantly, Bucholtz (1999:211) argues that being a nerd is not a matter of those in power attributing a negative identity to a marginalized group, but rather "that nerds in US high schools are...competent members of a distinctive and oppositionally defined community of practice." Bucholtz proposes that nerd girls employ positive and negative identity practices to negotiate what the users of such strategies *are* and *are not,* respectively.

Regarding the place of language in these practices, Bucholtz notes that the students in her study draw on phonology, syntax, lexicon, and discourse to assert their positions as nerd girls. For example, Bucholtz points out that these students avoid current slang, employ "lexical items associated with the formal register (e.g. Greco-Latinate forms)", and utilize less fronting of the variables (uw) and (ow), processes associated with students striving for coolness (Bucholtz 1999:212). Nerd girls draw on these symbolic practices – as well as other practices – to negotiate a shared take on "nerdiness," "a contested domain in which speakers struggle both over control of shared values, via positive identity practices (Who's better at being a nerd?), and over control of identity itself, via negative identity practices (Who counts as a nerd?)" (Bucholtz 1999:220). Thus, even within so-called marginalized communities, style plays a significant role in configuring center and margin.

2.4 Troping on Stylistic Norms: Parody

So far we have considered a number of groups who utilize the relational potential of style to subvert hegemonic norms. In this section I focus less on the groups which exploit this potential and more on the strategies such potential affords social actors to subvert, transgress, or resist norms. I begin by examining the role of parody as a veiled strategy for troping on dominant social-semiotic conventions. Then I consider three examples of parody which illustrate how social actors exploit "voicing effects" (Agha 2005, 2007) to comment on hegemonic normativity along the dimension of the symbolic. First I turn to a discussion of parody as an interactional trope.

Scholarship on parody has illustrated the potential it holds to interrogate social norms by challenging their naturalness through a variety of semiotic strategies (Agha 2007, Barrett 1999, Butler 1992, Chun 2007 *inter alios*). As Agha (2007) suggests, parody works by producing an inconguity at the level of the text. "To speak of co-occurring signs as an order of text," Agha (2007:24) notes, "is to observe that they have a unifying texture i.e., fit together in some way. This is another way of saying that a larger whole is evaluable for the congruence of its parts."

Central to this line of reasoning, as Agha points out, is the position that we possess "metasemiotic schemes" (2007:24) which normatively link semiotic elements of an interactional event, rendering certain configurations of cross-modal signs more congruent than others by virtue of conventionalization and socialization. Our knowledge of these norms makes possible their manipulation to parodic effect. This result is achieved through what Agha (2007:24) terms "text-level indexicality," the composite effect of evaluating the fit of various co-occurring signs. By purposefully juxtaposing

felcitiously co-occurring signs with those which our (normative) metasemiotic schemes rule as "out of place," social actors may call into question the very naturalness of the norms which link as congruent signifying acts and the entities with which they are associated (e.g. a particular subject position). Furthermore, such text-level effects may permit the social actor to carve out nuanced, novel, or hybrid subjectivities and voices.

One example of this process comes from Rusty Barrett's (1994, 1999) sociolinguistic work on drag performances. In this work, Barrett examines how drag performers counterpose a speech style stereotypically associated with middle class white women with other voices (those of straight or gay African American men, for example) to question and challenge ideological constructs such as racial and sexual normativity, as well as intersecting norms associated with classed behavior. Barrett describes how African American drag queens (AADQs) comment on both ethnicity and femininity "by using obscenities strategically" in the course of performing "white-woman" speech style, producing an incongruence between normative schemes of femininty and the actual performance. As Barrett points out,

> ...the white-woman style co-occurs with obscenities that suggest the "falseness" of the performed white-woman identity. By creating two contrasting voices within a single discourse, the performer plays off of the disjuncture between performed ("female") and biographical ("male") identity.

Important here is the juxtaposition of multiple voices with their own set of social meaning potentials. It is through this counterposition, Barrett argues, that AADQs assert

a hybrid identity, simultaneously voicing or evoking social images associated with various subject positions to produce a "heteroglossic" (Barrett 1999:318, citing Bakhtin 1981, 1984) voice and polyphonous identity:

> ...speakers may index a polyphonous, multilayered identity by using linguistic variables with indexical associations to more than one social category. In the case of AADQs, speakers typically use language to index their identities as African Americans, as gay men, and as drag queens. Through style shifting, the linguistic variables associated with each aspect of identity may co-occur, creating a voice simultaneously associated with several identity categories. (Barrett 1999:318)

Thus, we observe that the act of producing incongruent text-level effects may afford the performer not only with means to challenge essentialized constructs such as "femininity" or "gayness," but also with the means to voice a polyphonous, hybrid identity conveying more than the sum of its parts.

In her work on Kotis, Hall (2005) describes subversive performances of sexual identity – not unlike those examined in Barrett's work – which aim to challenge social norms and carve out a unique subjectivity. Hall's work examines the dynamic surrounding the classed sexualities of the "fourth breed" (Hall 2005:128) transgender kotis and hijra eunuchs in Northern India. Here, the concepts of parody and intertextuality take center stage as Hall describes the ideological positioning of Kotis through "hijra-acting," (Hall 2005:125) "where kotis spoof their upper-class gay and lesbian audience through a parody of the hijra birth celebration." (Hall 2005:127) Hall

cites the importance of parody in cutting a unique social figure, noting that the "kotis assert their own identity through parodic critique of the sexual desires associated with other class positions," including the "audience of upper-middle-class gays and lesbians" (Hall 2005:133) for whom the Kotis primarily perform.

As Hall argues, "[b]y reframing upper-class disapproval of their behavior as indicative of a prudish and uptight sexuality, koti performers manage to 'queer' their onlookers and assert themselves as the normative ones." (Hall 2005:133) Furthermore, in regard to the dynamic between hijras and "fake hijras" (as Kotis are called by Hijras), Hall notes that Kotis utilize parody as a means to "denaturalize the alleged asexuality of hijra identity...in order to establish the more 'genuine' boundaries of their own identity."

Kotis accomplish this, as Hall notes, by assuming the identity position of the hijra through voicing "hijraspeak," (Hall 2005:133) the style associated with hijras, which "involves a number of phonetic features, including high pitch, nasalization, increased volume, and elongated vowels at the end of intonational units," as well as "certain pragmatic features, in particular, the exclusive use of intimate second-person verbal and pronominal forms instead of the more socially acceptable familiar and polite forms." (Hall 2005:133) Kotis juxtapose this style with mockery of hijra sexuality and authenticity, for example, portraying hijras as "fake kotis" by "positioning the hijra as a dancing prositute," that is, a desiring and potentially desirable subject, qualities antithetical to "hiijraness". However, later in the performance, the kotis portray hijras as lacking the anatomy necessary for realizing the act of desire; in other words, hijras are portrayed as "all talk no action" – the "hijra prositute unable to follow through" with the act. (Hall 2005:139) As Hall (2005:138) notes, "[t]he anatomical and ascetic dimensions

of hijra identity are at once denaturalized and illegitimated, exposed as ideological constructs that hide the true nature of hijra desire." In this way, through the juxtaposition of social critique and the use of hijraspeak style, "[k]oti identity, avowedly promiscuous and anti-ascetic, thus asserts itself as a more modern, if not realistic, expression of sexual desire."

In a different context, the historian Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2007) describes a similar use of parodic performance to denaturalize hegemonic constructions of "realness" in popular hip hop music. Ogbar's analysis is located in a more general examination of authenticity in hip hop, particularly in the circulation of images which portray hip hop culture and "blackness" in unrealistically hypermaterialistic terms. These portrayals often revolve around a gangsta-druglord-made-good trope, drawing on imagery from mafia movies. "Frequently dressing like classic Italian mobsters in their videos," Ogbar notes, "these MCs often named themselves after famous Italian or Colombian mobsters and made earnest attempts to be down with La Cosa Nostra." (2007:112). Not all artists sought to promote images of mafia affilliation, but those within the scope of Ogbar's analysis are united by their self-presentation as larger than life through portraying themselves as filthy rich, living the lifestyle of the wealthy elite.

As Ogbar (2007:113) points out, a number of artists have railed against such portrayals of hip hop authenticity, voicing their dissatifaction with "the rise of hyper-materialistic elements in hip-hop". Among these artists is the Philadelphia-based group The Roots who, as Ogbar illustrates, devoted an entire song and music video to pulling back the veil on the over-the-top production and unrealistic lifestyles characteristic of many then-current hip hop videos. Ogbar describes the song "What they Do" as "a

barrage of rhymes cricitizing the gaudy fantasy world of some rappers," drawing not only on lyric but also the visual language of the video to parody "the ubiquitious materialism of rappers."

Lyrically, The Roots attack what we could refer to as the hip-hop-as-having-things discourse, through which MCs assert their success by portraying themselves as posesessing the finest garments, libations, cars, homes, and the like. This rhetoric, and the visual language which accompanies it, comments both directly and indirectly on what's "real," or what's expected of the successful artist and – by extension – his or her listenership. In their song "What they Do," Roots frontman Blackthought directly challenges the focus on conspicuous consumption which, at the time of the song, had come to dominate popular hip hop music lyrically and visually. Specificially, Blackthought attempts to denaturalize the hip-hop-as-having-things disocurse by evoking the hip-hop-as-art discourse, which puts center stage lyrical prowess and artistic skill, instead of the fruits of such talents:

1 The principles of true hip-hop have been forsaken
2 It's all contractual and about money makin
3 Pretend-to-be cats don't seem to know they limitation
4 Exact replication and false representation
5 You wanna be a man, then stand your own
6 To MC requires skills, I demand some shown

(The Roots "What they Do")

Regarding the use of visual language in the parody, we observe the juxtaposition of lavish images in the video with captions defrauding these images as not-quite-what-they-seem. As Ogbar (2007:115) describes,

> The video opens with a shot of a mansion, with a caption that reads, "The Goldstein estate, day rental." In one scene, the lead rapper sits on a bed with three beautiful women. "Yeah, right," the screen reads. Sitting in front of high-priced automobiles, the captions asks, "Can we afford this?"

Thus, we observe the composite, text-level-indexical effects Agha describes, in this example through very direct means. These effects are achieved by juxtaposing explicit commentary of hypermaterialism, both in terms of the song's lyrics and the video's captions, with over-the-top lyrics and images of materialistic self-indulgence and concspicuous consumption. This counterposition creates a tension between what is seen, heard, and read, bringing into sharp focus the discourse of authenticity around which the Roots' song focuses. The parodic nature of the Roots' video functions to denaturalize the high-roller-rapper trope, shining a light on the lyrical and visual means of self-aggrandizement which undergird unrealistic images of the lifestyles of some hip hop artists. To denaturalize these images, The Roots employ stylistic elements associated with popular hip hop music, including practices involving elements of material culture (e.g. high-priced cars, wearing expensive designer clothing, etc.).

In this way, the artists "style the other" (Rampton 1999) to critique the other, as was also the case with koti hijra-acting and the drag performances described by Barrett. In each instance, we observe social actors drawing on stylistic elements stereotypically

associated with another social group to "voice" this group, while simultaneously drawing attention to undesirable qualities of those voiced. In Barrett's case, this takes the form of critiquing a prudish femininity by juxaposing "white-woman style" with other voices, voices which violate dominant scripts of femininity. Drag performers interweave these styles while presenting their unique ways-of-being as more desirable. The same can be said about Hall's analysis of hijra acting.

In all three cases examined above, we observe the potency of parody and performance to question and resist dominant norms, through drag performances, hijra acting, and hip hop music. In particular, parody offers performers a means to interrogate stylistic norms, the metasemiotic schemes which allow us to navigate the social world. It is in this respect that style is intimately tied to language ideology, as our models of the way language and sociocultural phenomena give meaning to style. As Bell (2001:142-143) notes, "[s]tylistic meaning...has a normative basis. A particular style is normally associated with a paritular group or situation, and therefore carries with it the flavor of those associations..." In the next section, I examine the ideological basis of style, focusing first on conceptions of language ideology, and then turning to a discussion of strategies for producing two particular ideological constructs: Authenticity and indigeneity.

2.5 The Normative Basis of Style

2.5.1 Conceptualizing Language Ideology: Some Strands of Thought

In her essay "Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry", Woolard (1998:3) provides the following broad definition of language ideology: "Representations, whether explicit or

implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world are what we mean by 'language ideology.'" Taking this as a point of departure, she discusses "common strands" in the research on language ideology. Among these, Woolard suggests that "the most widely agreed-upon...is a conceptualization of ideology as derived from, rooted in, reflective of, or responsive to the experience or interests of a particular social position" (1998:6). On this view,

> ideology is not necessarily conscious, deliberate, or systematically organized thought, or even thought at all; it is behavioral, practical, prereflective, or structural. Signification—or, more simply, meaning—rather than ideation in a mentalist sense is the core phenomenon in...contemporary uses. (1998:6)

From this perspective, language ideology resides in the socially-meaningful relationship between language use and social differentiation. This relationship involves experientially-based indexicalities, deriving from a triangulation of our prereflective experience with linguistic variation and differential social positioning.

Thus, language ideology can be conceptualized as implicit, practical knowledge. The term is also often used, however, to refer to discursive knowledge, shared by members of a group, of the ways in which linguistic practices and social relationships interrelate. From this perspective, language ideology includes "local models" or "constructs that emerge as part of the sociocultural experience of cultural actors" (Kroskrity 2000:7). Silverstein conceptualizes language ideologies in a similar way, defining them as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization

or justification of perceived language structure and use." (cited in Kroskrity 2000) In his overview of approaches to language ideology, Kroskrity (2000:7) compares this definition with that of Irvine (1989:255), in which language ideology is treated as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests." Drawing a parallel, Kroskrity suggests that "[b]oth definitions place a focal emphasis on speakers' ideas about language and discourse and about how these articulate with various social phenomena." (2000:5) It is in this respect that Silverstein and Irvine's definitions differ from the perspective described by Woolard, in which language ideologies form part of practical – and not discursive – consciousness (Giddens 1984). Related to the practical/discursive divide is what Woolard and Schieffelin refer to as "the siting of ideology," (1994:57) or the identification of appropriate sources for its study. The suitability of one source in comparison with another depends in large part on whether ideology is viewed as primarily prereflective.

Thus, for Silverstein, as Woolard points out, appropriate sources include those which are metalinguistic in nature, that is, "explicit talk about language" (1998:9) Of course, the matter of where to look for ideologies of language depends in part on a related factor, namely, the specific aims of a given study or research program. If the main intention is to discover attitudes toward the perceived language use of a social group or groups, a number of methodological options exist. For instance, a mapping task, such as the one utilized by Niedzielski and Preston (2000), may be employed to discover what linguistic stereotypes come into play when people reflect on regional linguistic variation and its social meanings. The selection or design of methods for investigation, however, is

not separate from but rather intimately tied to the siting of ideology and, thus, to its conceptualization by the researcher.

Following Sclafani (2009), I adopt an expansive perspective of language ideology which includes prereflective, experientially-based signification as well as the discursively-available meanings which underpin folk models of linguistic practices. The present approach, then, does not privilege practical knowledge over discursive knowledge. Nor is a definite stance taken on the ontological status of what I will refer to as language ideology. This neutral and inclusive position accords, by and large, with Woolard's broad definition quoted at the outset of this section (1998:3). The panoptic use I make of "language ideology" as an analytic concept derives in large part from the goals of the research program being proposed here. This research aims to discover the social meaning potential of stylistic practices, how these meanings become conventionalized, and how shared orientations to linguistic practices constrain and/or enable the co-construction of Hip Hop personae. Accordingly, the methodology described in Chapter 4 includes a perceptual task designed to evoke folk models of Hip Hop style and local language use. This task, which elicits geographical judgments and social valuations of stylistic practices, draws on participants' metapragmatic awareness (cf. Brown 2006) of local and nonlocal linguistic practices.

In addition to elicitation, discourse analysis of ethnographic interviews, Hip Hop lyrics, and public sources of data (including blogs, Myspace comments, and magazine interviews) is coupled with instrumental and impressionistic phonetic analysis of linguistic variables used in the performance of rap music. Through this combination of methods, I intend to investigate the interrelatedness of stylistic variation, attitudes toward

and beliefs about stylistic practices, and differential positioning vis-à-vis the hip-hop-as-hustle and hip-hop-as-art discourses.

Both of these non-mutually-exclusive discourses revolve around ways of conceptualizing authenticity in relation to the hip hop performer as social subject. In the hip-hop-as-hustle discourse, authenticity primarily involves lived experiences through engagement in often illicit social practices grounded in black spaces and places. In the hip-hop-as-art discourse, authenticity centers around lyrical skills and is grounded in the traditions and origins of hip hop culture (cf. Ogbar 2007:137). Artists draw on these widely-circulated discourses not only to position themselves differently vis-à-vis available and hybrid subject positions, but also to authenticate their claim to these subject positions. In other words, hip hop performers evoke the aforementioned discourses while utilizing tactics for both authenticating their own social positions and denaturalizing the positioning of other artists. In the following sections, I discuss these two strategies, authentication and denaturalization, as well as the use of essentializing discourse. I begin by briefly discusing contemporary takes on the nature and place of authenticity in sociolinguistics.

2.5.2 Authenticity in Sociolinguistics

Much of the influential recent work on sociolinguistic authenticity (Bucholtz 2003, Coupland 2001, 2003, Eckert 2003, Shenk 2007 *inter alios*) has focused on its discursively-constructed nature, both in terms of social actors constructing authenticities and we, as researchers, constructing analytic concepts such as "the authentic speaker." (Eckert 2003). Indeed, as Bucholtz notes, authenticity is central to sociolinguisitc

practice; it "underwrites nearly every aspect of sociolinguistics, from our identification of socially meaningful linguistic phenomena, to the definition of the social groups we study, to the methods we use to collect our data, to the theories we draw on in our analysis." (2003:398) In writing this, Bucholtz speaks of the ideological quality of authenticity as a way of understanding what constitutes a particular social entitity (i.e. an individual), a particular social group (e.g. a gang, or abstract groupings such as ethnicity – "Blackness" or "Whiteness"), and the relationship between them. Constructing this manner of understanding happens in interaction among social actors in the world, as well as through the work we do as sociolinguists, parceling out speakers into often discrete groupings.

It is in this respect that authenticity involves reification and essentialization, reducing the complexity of our social experience to things we can name, sort, and evaluate. As Eckert keenly points out, "[a]uthenticity implies stasis." (2003:393). "But," as Eckert continues, "neither social locations and identities, nor language, are static." (Eckert 2003:393). In other words, authenticity is something we pull off moment-by-moment, day-by-day; its existence depends on a continual renewal, and thus, researchers such as Bucholtz (2003) have proposed viewing it primarily as a process, as authentication. Authenticity is something we achieve or accomplish through acts of signifying. As Coupland notes, "language is every bit as much a means of *achieveing* authenticity as it is a means to discrediting it." (Coupland 2003:417, emphasis original) And what is achieved are what Bucholtz calls "authenticity effects" (2003), amounting to a shared take on the boundaries of some social group, including how to align oneself with this group as a member.

Thus group membership lies at the heart of authenticity – the relationship between (social) entitity and group (Bucholtz 2003, Coupland 2003). And, as Bucholtz points out, what underlies the possibility of the social relation of group membership is essentialism (Bucholtz 2003:400). As she notes,

> [t]he idea of authenticity gains its force from essentialism, for the possibility of a 'real' or 'genuine'group member relies on the belief that what differentiates 'real' members from those who only pretend to authentic membership is that the former, by virtue of biology or culture or both, possess inherent and perhaps even inalienable characteristics criterial of membership.

Bucholtz thus describes essentialism as an ideology, a socially-constructed shared take on who counts as a legitimate member of a particular social group. It is here that power enters the picture, as the ability to configure the centers and margins of a subjectivity engenders the potential to sustain the power of those who fit the central mold and marginalize those who do not. In this respect, speakers have a stake in ideologies of authenticity and the discursive practices which sustatin them, because these ways-of-understanding-things constrain how we position ourselves in the social world; that is, they mediate our acts of self-presentation. These ideologies also, however, enable us to take up various social positions through authenticating acts, as well as to question the position of others through acts of denaturalization. In the next section I discuss these two tactics, and afterwards return to the theme of essentialism in examining how speakers

utilize essentializing rhetoric to configure the boundaries of social formations and subjectivities.

2.5.3 Authentication and Denaturaliztion

In their joint work, Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2004b, 2005) have proposed several principles to explain how social actors draw on language, exploiting language ideology to position self and other linguistically. Within the scope of one of these principles, "the relationality principle" Bucholtz and Hall 2005:598), the authors describe several relations which they have termed "tactics of intersubjectivity," (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b) pairs of relations which "typically work in conjunction with one another" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b) to co-construct identities. Of particular import to the present work is the pair of relations they term authentication and denaturalization, which they define as follows:

> ...authentication and denaturalization [...] are the processes by which speakers make claims to realness and artifice, respectively. While both relations have to do with authenticity, the first focuses on the ways in which identities are discursively verified and the second on how assumptions regarding the seamlessness of identity can be disrupted. (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b)

Underpinning each process is an ideology of "realness" which construes the relationship between group and group members in social-stylistic terms, amongst other dimensions along which membership may be established. In the case of authentication, as Bucholtz

and Hall point out, social actors "verify" their social position discursively, where discursive may be understood here to include various modes of signification. This verification presupposes the type of metasemiotic schemes discussed earlier, here specifically in terms of social-semiotic boundaries: What constitutes a genuine member of Group X? We thus return to essentialism; Bucholtz and Hall (2004b:386) note that "*authentication*...as we use it in in this model, refers to how speakers activate...essentialist readings in the articulation of identity."

To illustrate the tactic of authentication with a concrete example, I return to Shenk's (2007) work on the articulation of "Mexicanness" through linguistic and rhetorical strategies she terms "authenticating moves." Among these strategies, the author notes, are overt claims to one's authenticity as Mexican, made in relation to or revolving around linguistic usages in some cases. In one such instance, two students in Shenk's study, Bela and Rica, discuss the pronunciation of the Spanish word for Thursday, 'jueves,' canonoically pronounced [ɣoeβes]. In the stretch of discourse Shenk (2007:210) analyzes, Rica says to Bela that "Ayer fue joves <[hoves]>," pronouncing the word meaning Thursday with the glottal fricative [h] and the monophthongal [o] instead of the uvular fricative [ɣ] and diphthong [oe], respectively. For this transgression Bella laughs at Rica and attacks her, overarticulating the word 'jueves' later in the discourse and then threatening to "revoke" Rica's "Mexican priveliges." (Shenk 2007:211). As Shenk (2007:212) points out,

> Bela indexes her own authenticity by highlighting Rica's cultural inauthenticity and inadequacy, which is manifested in the form of a speech error. Bela positions Rica as inauthentic with multiple authenticating

moves; she: laughs at her (lines 4, 10, 17); calls her 'dummy' ('No mensa' line 10); overarticulates and repairs the speech error for her (line 13); mocks her by repeating the speech error (lines 17, 25); and overtly sanctions her entitlement to Mexican ethnic identity ('I'm revoking your Mexican privileges' lines 21 and 23).

It is through these moves that Bela authenticates her own claim to Mexicanness, while simultaenously positioning Rica as inauthentic. The efficacy of these moves depends on "the language condition," (Shenk 2007:201), an ideology which "states that authentic Mexicans must speak Spanish fluently, regardless of dialect, without error." Bela exploits this ideology to assert her own authenticity as truly Mexican.

Such ideologies may be exploited for other means, as Bucholtz and Hall explain (2004a, 2004b), to chisel away at the ideological naturalness of the connection between style, group membership, and notions of realness as they relate to essentialized categories such as "white woman" or "gay man". As an example, Bucholtz and Hall (2004b:386) cite Barrett's work on AADQs, noting that the performers studied "regularly disrupt their performance of white femaleness in order to question the naturalness of categories of race and gender." They continue, noting that "[p]erformance is an especially rich site for the study of the tactic of denaturalization," (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b:386) which is evidenced by the koti hijra-acting discussed earlier. In that case, by adopting hijra-style, kotis were able to question the cultural and even biological natrualness of what it means to be an authentic hijra and, by extension, what it means to be a fake one.

Both cases cited here depend on ideologies which essentialize subject positions such as hijra or Mexican, ideologies which involve acts of boundary construction through

various sorts of essentializing discourse, including authenticating discourse, which reproduces essentialist notions of subjectivities. One particularly salient case of this process is the enregisterment of local styles through processes of commodification, as in the case of Pittsburghese (Johnstone et al 2002) or, as I shall discuss in greater detail below, through the essentializing rhetoric of hip hop discourse.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have sought to provide an overview of several influential ways of conceptualizing style, including those associated with Eckert and the Stanford Tradition, Nikolas Coupland, and Judith Irvine. Each of their approaches takes a social-constructivist perspective which conceptualizes the speaker as a social agent involved in the process of making and remaking stylistic practices. Moreover, each of the theorists considered above acknowledge that linguistic style is part of a wider system of signification which includes modalities other than that of language.

Regarding the notion of style itself, I have examined several themes centeral to its theorization, including the position that style constitutes social practice, a view which emphasizes the processual dimension of style. I have also considered the roles style plays in configuring centers and margins of sociocultural formations and subject positions. Related to this theme is the potential style holds to resist dominant ideologies of style. Underlying this potential is the continually-sedimenting meaning potentials that styles evoke. In the next chapter, I examine considerations necessary for understanding how these meaning potentials conventionalize. In formal terms, I also consider the proceses which lead certain semiotic configurations to "hang together" as styles (Coupland

2007:2) Through an examination of the intertextual, diachronic processes which give rise to styles, we come closer to underestanding the (dominant) meaning potentials of style and, thus, the issues of power, access, and meaning-making rights surrounding style.

Chapter Three

Conventionalizing Style

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed ways of conceptualizing style which I draw on in this dissertation, including approaches that view style and stylistic acts as social practices, processes of distinction, resources for boundary construction, and acts of domination and resistance. Each of these perspectives presupposes some degree of conventionalization with regard to the meaning potentials of styles and stylistic acts. As Eckert (2005:24) notes, the deployment of particular stylistic elements "requires that they have some general conventional meaning," as "speakers select resources on the basis of their potential comprehensibility in [a] community..." (Eckert 2004:44) In other words, styles and the practices which constitute them possess some general meaning which, as we noted in §3.1.2, come to take on more specific, localized meanings in their situated occasion of use.

Important to note here is not only the flexibility of style as we press it into service to fashion selves, but also the socially-constructed coherence of particular styles, especially those which become reified through processes of labeling. Without assuming any fixity or taking a deterministic position, we can appreciate the sedimentation of style through very local acts of identity and widely-circulated performances of personae, ramping up to crystallize into flexible frameworks for doing social work at both the local and global level. In this way, style and stylistic conventions are things made and remade

in and through social intercourse of various kinds, mediated in part by social hierarchies, access to positions of power within these hierarchies, and access to institutions which circulate stylistic norms (Hebdige 1979), such as the radio and print media. In other words, the social meaning potential of style relies on interest-laden processes of conventionalization, by which elements of a particular style come to cohere both formally, as a configuration of signs and signifying acts, and meaningfully, as this configuration becomes linked with the stances and ideological positions which give substance to social formations and subjectivities.

In this chapter I explore various considerations and processes underyling the production of stylistic conventions. Following Eckert's (2000, 2005) social-constructivist position, I focus on the processual dimension of conventions, that is, on conventionalization, i.e. how and by whom conventions are made and remade through time. As Eckert (2000:45) posits, "[c]onvention is not a thing but a process, and the possibility of convention resides in speakers' ability to hypothesize about others' behavior and to take interpretable action, along with commitment for doing so within a particular social unit."

In what follows, I explore "the possibility of convention" by examining how social actors "take intepretable action" through mundane and spectacular performances. It is through such performances that we take up a various social positions through linguistic and non-linguistic stylistic acts, further sedimenting extant connections between signifiying practices and their meaning potentials or forging new connections, as in the case of bricolage. In examining the role of performance in conventionalizing stylistic

practices, I shall consider the intertextual and dialogical bases of style, focusing on the place of consistency, repetition, and distinction in yielding socially-differnetiable styles.

In the following sections, I look not only at how style conventionalizes through performance, but also how social actors produce texts and reiterable textual practices through performance. In §3.3 I explore these processes by examining the relationships between different levels of semiotic organization and rhetorical practices. This section focuses on recent ideas proposed by Woolard (2008), as well as strands of thought in the sociolinguistic literature which I weave together, to help explain how particular phonetic variables come to aquire salience by virtue of being embedded in salient cultural terms and phrases – reiterable chunks of language and linguistic practices – used to specific rhetorical ends, such as asserting one's indigeneity. I propose that this process of bootstrapping lends insights to our understanding of the indexical potentials of particular variables by connecting levels of semiotic organization about which we are potentially less concscious – such as phonetic variation – with other levels of linguistic and semiotic organization about which we are more concsious, such as the use of particular words, phrases, or discourse strategies.

I then turn in §3.4 to a discussion of the role that specific types of social actors, who have been dubbed "social" or "stylistic icons" in the sociolinguistic literature (Eckert 2000, 2003), play in conventionalizing stylistic practices through their salient performances. As Eckert (2000) and Mendoza-Denton (2008) have noted, these speakers contribute to processes of sedimentation by virtue of their status in social groups and consequent ability to define stylistic norms. It is through the perormances – banal or spectacular – of such icons that stylistic acts gain currency in particular communities,

acquiring indexical values associated with the stances and ideological positions taken up by these social icons.

I then turn in §3.5 to the issue of social circulation, namely, how particular signifying practices gain broad currency and become known both to those who frequently use or less frequently use these practices. This section seeks to examine how such practices, especially linguistic variants, gain currency at the local and global level. Accordingly, I look at one approach to the micro-level study of conventionalization through the community of practice theoretical construct (Wenger 1998, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, Eckert 2000). In examining macro-level processes of stylistic conventionalization, I consider the role of various media, including print and electronic media such as newspapers, fanzines, and blogs, as well as the role played by the radio in shaping stylistic norms.

In §3.6 I conclude the chapter by examining a special case of conventionalization, the indigenization of style. This section draws heavily on the enregisterment literature (Agha 2007, Remlinger 2009), particularly its focus on the connection made between elements of style, social types, and senses of or orientations toward place. The present project shares the aim of the enregisterment literature to uncover the processes by which individual social actors and institutions such as the media produce shared ideas about what it means to look, act, and sound "authentically local." As we shall see, the production of such knowledge depeneds in large part on performative acts of representation. I therefore open the body of this chapter with a discussion of role performance plays in the conventionalization of style.

3.2 Performance: How do we make and remake style?

3.2.1 Performance as a site for making and remaking style

As Chun (2006) points out in her article on mocking in a U.S. high school setting, sociolinguists have typically avoided examining overtly performative language use as "bad data" (Chun 2006:40), unnatural as regards an ideology of language use which priveliges as more authentic mundane, unobserved lanugage use, in contrast with highly self-conscious and openly observed performances of languages. However, as Chun points out, examining performative language, both mundane and spectacular, provides "a window into local ideologies" (Chun 2006:40) within particular communities, offering us rich insights into the ways social actors use language to negotiate the social-semiotic boundaries of subjectivities such as "Asian youth." Mendoza-Denton (1999:240-241) echoes these sentiments in her discussion of the emergence of style through performance. As she puts it: "The emphasis on performance connects to the question of how different styles emerge. Studies of repetition and ritualization in language suggest that item frequency, markedness, and social evaluation are all important factors in the crystallization of styles." (Mendoza-Denton 1999:240). Key to Mendoza-Denton's point is that frequency and repetition – as well as the markedness – of semiotic acts in performances contribute to the sedimentation of these acts as coherent styles.

Also central to this line of reasoning is the nature of performance itself as a semiotic act which "calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression, and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity." (Bauman 2001) In other words, as Mendoza-Denton (1999:239) and others have pointed out, performance calls attention to style, because in

performances "features of utterances are organized in such a way that the organization calls attention to itself, and style is put on display for enjoyment, evaluation, and scrutiny by an audience." This heightened awareness, along with frequency, repetition, and markedness, hold significant implications for an understanding of the conventionalization of style through performance. These points will be discussed further in §3.2.3. First, as this section aims to flesh out the connection between performance and the sedimentation of style, I shall briefly consider two ways of framing performance, as either mundane performance, on the one hand, or spectacular or high performance, on the other.

3.2.2 Types of Performance: the Mundane and the Spectacular

In recent years, performance and performativity have become the focus of a diverse and growing number of studies concerned with language use as sociocultural practice. Among these investigations, some build on the Goffmanian tradition of applying the notion of performance to the analysis of commonplace social acts (Bucholtz 1999; Chun 2006; Holmes and Schnurr 2006; Shuck 2004 *inter alios*), while others examine performances which more readily fit traditional conceptions of verbal art (Alim 2002, 2004; Bauman 2001; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Cutler 2002; Morgan 2002). In his work on style and performance, Coupland (2007) draws on insights from Bauman's research in proposing a cline from the more mundane, everyday performances which take place in conversational exchanges to the more ritualized, routinized performances which involve a clear distinction between audience and performer. Coupland (2007:146-147, original emphasis) writes: "...there is...a distinction to be drawn between what we might call

mundane performance and *high performance*, or at least we should recognise a scale that runs between these two performance types or formats."

In what follows, I shall refer to what Coupland terms "high performance" as spectacular performance, in keeping with the CCCS tradition of referring to spectacular styles (cf. Chun 2004 for similar terminological usage.) Before discussing what separates these spectacular performances from the mundane, I shall examine more closely the latter to throw into relief the ways we, as social actors, perform and enact stances and identities through interactions which ramp up into frameworks - durable structures of style.

One route through which the notion of mundane performance has made its way into the sociolinguistics literature is through work on language and gender, particularly the work of Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2005), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, 2003) and Livia and Hall (1997b). Bucholtz and Hall (2004:491-492) expand on Butler's (1990) notion of performativity by focusing on the agency of speakers in deploying elements from their semiotic repertoire to fashion selves. Significant to Bucholtz and Hall's theorizing of identity and performance is the mediating – but reflexively flexible – force of (language) ideology. That is, we are both constrained and enabled by such ideologies in the kinds of linguistic performances of identity discussed by the authors. Through the repetition of these performances, semiotic practices become tethered not only to the types of people who regularly perform them, but also the stances and ideological positions taken up by these speakers. It is in this respect that mundane performances ramp up into more abstract, durable structures for self-presentation.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004:491) discuss Butler's (1990) take on this process whereby norms are produced through mundane performance:

> For Butler, gender is performative in the sense that it is brought into being through linguistic and other semiotic practices. She argues that gender performances are effective (that is, culturally intelligible) only when they meet socially imposed norms or regulations of gender-appropriateness. The repetition of such performances reproduces the regulation of gender, setting the limits on culturally admissible gender practices.

The authors continue though, noting that, from Butler's perspective, "some performances may involve a deliberate violation of gender norms, such as drag, or the ironic appropriation of gender practices." (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b:491) Thus we are left not with a deterministic view of practice determined by structure, but rather the manner of relationship Giddens (1979, 1984) describes where structural patterns are reproduced and modified through the mediated engagement of social actors in interactions of various sorts, including mundane and spectacular performances. Indeed, it is here, as Carter (2007) points out citing Butler, where we find one perspective of agency. Carter (2007:12) notes that "[i]n theorizing regulatory systems, Judith Butler claims agency comes in 'recognizing norms.'" Advancing the position regarding agency taken in Butler's later work (e.g.2004), Carter (2007:12) observes

> For Butler and other Poststructuralist theorists, agency is about exercising choice within determinant limits. The agentive, then, does not pre-exist or operate outside of social context or ideology; indeed, the social and the ideological produce the possibility of volition.

Returning to the relationship between mundane performances and style, we may make use of these sociolinguistic takes on Butler's pioneering work in considering how speakers, for example, perform "white and nerdy" in everyday conversation through the deployment of ideologically-saturated signs. Key to this perspective is the idea that we enact roles, relations, and personae that are associated with certain performative practices. For example, in her work on "nerd girls," Bucholtz (1999) describes how a group of young women forge an open repertoire of collective practices to enact their nerd personae. Undergirding this process are ideologies of language, including what Lippi-Green (1997) refers to as "standard language ideology", or "SLI," as well as local ideologies regarding who uses which linguistic practices, to what ends, and with what consequences. In other words, the young women in Bucholtz' research aren't reaching out into a vaccuum, but rather pressing into service locally-available and meaningful linguistic resources.

Bucholtz (1999:211-212) proposes that nerds employ a range of linguistic indices to assert their positions as "competent members of a distinctive and oppositionally defined community of practice." These indices are by and large in wide circulation locally, and thus derive their meaning potential from being employed by various social actors, both students and adults, in the local symbolic economy of the school. For example, key to nerd identity practices is the collective value nerds place on intelligence and individuality. Accordingly, as Bucholtz describes, the young women in her study adopt strategies for collectively aspiring to these values which, as Bucholtz points out, are somewhat counter-hegemonic in a social scene dominated by "cool" high school social groups. Among the strategies adopted by the nerds is the avoidance of current

slang, indexical of aspirations of coolness, as well as the use of "superstandard and hypercorrect phonological forms" (Bucholtz 1999:212). In this case, the young women employ forms associated with intelligence to enact personae which embody this quality.

Thus, the "nerd girls" of Bucholtz's study effectively perform a nerd identity through enactment of personae conducive to their own self-perceptions and intentions, in order to distinguish themselves collectively from other visible social groups in the school. Through repeated use of particular symbolic strategies, these young women forge a meaningful repertoire of semiotic practices which in large part embodies their core values as a community of practice. In other words, nerd style conventionalizes through the continual performance and enactment of a unique nerd subjectivity. It is through these mundane performances that not only nerd style, but nerdiness in general, comes to take form and perdure beyond the ephemerality of interactions, forming frameworks for "doing nerdy" in the future.

Key to these processes of conventionalization is Coupland's (2007) position that we are in some measure aware of alternative stylistic practices and thus choose – or avoid – particular ones over others in the service of self-presentation, that is, what we've been calling mundane performance. Such is also the case in spectacular performance, where the relationship between alternatives is thrown into sharp relief to achieve the goals of the performer. Before considering how these stylistic processes unfold, I first turn to Coupland's (2007) discussion of the criteria which set spectacular performances apart from the mundane performances of our everyday exchanges.

Drawing on the insights of Bauman (1990, 2001), Coupland infers a number of characteristics which distinguish what I'm calling spectacular performance from

mundane performances. With a nod to Bauman, Coupland (2007:147, original emphasis) writes:

> He [Bauman] says [spectacular performances] are scheduled events, typically pre-announced and planned, and therefore programmed. They are temporally and spatially bounded events, marked off from the routine flow of communicative practice. They are co-ordinated, in the sense that they rely on specific sorts of collaborative activitiy, not least in that performers and audience members will establish themselves in these participant roles for the enactment of the performance. High [spectacular] performances are typically also public events, in that the membership of the auidence willl not be espeically exclusive...These characteristics are material aspects of how high performance events are contextualized, but Bauman also identifies the heightened *intensity* of performance events as a key characteristic.

Before discussing this notion of "intensity," let us first turn to the list of characteristics which separate spectacular performance from the mundane, focusing particular on those aspects which bear most significantly on the conventionalization of style. Coupland notes that spectacular performances are often pre-planned, announced, made public, and, in these and other ways, established as events distinct from the flow of everday life. One additional way in which spectacular performances differ from mundane performances resides in the ritualized participant roles of performer and audience, often sharply differentiated through the material framing of performance as Coupland (2007) and

Bauman and Briggs (1990) suggest. This framing involves each of the characteristics listed in the long passage above, and it entails a special relationship between the performers, the audience, and the performance itself.

Regarding the intensity of spectacular performances, the framing of such performances, as Bauman and Briggs (1990) note, "puts the act of speaking on display – objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience." They continue, proposing that "[p]erformance heightens awareness of the act of speaking and licenses the audience to evaluate the skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment. By its very nature, then, performance potentiates decontextualization." This last point is key to the role of spectacular performances in conventionalizing elements of style by rendering them decontextualizable and, consequently, recontextualizable. I elaborate this point in greater detail in §3.2.3. Before turning to this discusssion though, I return to the first Bauman and Briggs quote above, in which the authors emphasize the extent to which performance functions as what Bauman (2004:2) refers to as "conventionalized orienting frameworks," opening the performer's work to a heightened degree of scrutiny on behalf of the audience. In this respect, "[p]erformance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression." (Bauman 2001:169)

This "heightened awareness" makes spectacular performance a rich site for social meaning making, as both performer and audience are especially attuned to the form of the performance and what consequences come from employing particular semiotic practices over others. That is, one component of the heightened awareness of which Bauman speaks involves the mediating role of (language) ideology. The performer and audience

share not only similar expectations about their respective roles in the performance, but also, in some measure, they share ideas about the meaning potentials of symbolic practices such as linguistic variation. Thus, although particular audience members' attitudes towards the American South, for example, may differ, performers may draw on phonological or lexical items stereotypically associated with some notion of "Southerness" to quickly flesh out a character, potentially drawing on the ideological effects of hegemonic portrayals of what such a quality entails (e.g.. quaintness, friendliness, impoverishment, "backwards," etc.) In exploiting these ideological associations, performers are in a central position to further sediment the connection between linguistic (or other semiotic) practices and social meanings associated with stereotypic types of speakers (in this example, a stereotypic "Southerner").

It is this process of conventionalization that Lippi-Green (1997) discusses at length in her examination of instutions including the news media and animated film industry. For instance, in the case of Disney films, Lippi-Green (1997) shows that the producers of such films more often portray speakers with non-native accents as bad, or at least partially bad, giving Lippi-Green reason to argue that by more frequently representing evil characters as foreign, the producers and writers have the power to produce and reinforce xenophobic ideologies by presenting a world to children in which nearly half of the people who speak with a foreign accent are evil, and more than half are evil for some portion of the movie. Thus, returning to the theme of conventionalizing style, Lippi-Green's study provides one example of a widely-circulated and consumed medium – children's animated films – in which spectacular performances make ideological connections with linguistic practices.

Lippi-Green's analysis also illustrates one approach to the siting of ideology. In her study, she examines language variation as signifying practice by focusing not only on what is said, but also on the relationships between how it is said, by whom, and under what circumstances. In other words, Lippi-Green attempts to situate the choice of one language variety over another in relation to the systematic patterning of meaningful relations presented through the film's portrayal of a social world. This world cannot completely escape the projection of extant, socially-meaningful relations, rooted in the experience of both the film's creators and the performers who bring its characters to life. Working from such an assumption, Lippi-Green explores the ways in which animated films both exploit shared orientations to linguistic material (i.e. construct personae drawing on linguistic stereotypes) and contribute to the (re)production of such orientations (i.e. reinforce or create linguistic stereotypes through choice of language variety).

The research proposed here shares with Lippi-Green's study concerns both to flesh out how linguistic ideology bears on performance and to investigate the ways in which performance potentially reproduces shared assumptions about language, including the conventionalized relationships among stylistic elements and their social meanings. However, our two studies differ both in aims and foci. Lippi-Green attempts to show that, by having certain characters use mainstream US English, the people involved in creating animated films collude—perhaps unwittingly—to reinforce "Standard Language Ideology" (1997:64). By contrast, the present study explores how the stylistic practices of Hip Hop artists, as individual performers from the same city, feedback into local (and potentially nonlocal) conceptions of Houston style in Hip Hop. Moreover, the conditions

under which performance takes place in animated films differ greatly from those of Hip Hop. Voice actors play roles conceived by someone else; they may attempt to make them "their own" through various linguistic choices, but ultimately these roles are creations of other people. In this way, voice actors construct personae which may be very different from the personae constructed day-to-day in their personal lives. Hip Hop artists, by contrast, engage in a presentation of self for which they have much at stake personally. Through their music, these artists present themselves as real people from very real places—just like the audience for whom they perform. In this way, artists must take into consideration the potential to be held accountable for their self-representations. In other words, to be respected by their audience, Hip Hop artists must often construct "street-conscious" personae, as Alim (2002) suggests in his study of copula variation.

"The streets", from Alim's perspective, "are seen not only as a physical space, but also as a cultural space that represents the values, morals, aesthetics, and codes of conduct that govern life in urban America." (2002:288) According to Alim's analysis, it is to this cultural space that artists orient in designing their performances. In other words, to demonstrate a connection with their "primary audience", rappers employ linguistic practices which not only reflect the experience of "African American Street Culture" (2002:300), but which also, in part, are constitutive of this experience. Thus, as Alim's analysis suggests, some Hip Hop artists draw on shared understandings of how the linguistic and the social articulate in order to create solidarity[11] and fashion selves. They

[11] The aim of the present work differs from that of Alim's in that I seek to examine a conflict situation in which social actors make differential use of symbolic material not to construct macro-level solidarity with an abstract conception of "the streets," but rather to challenge hegemonic constructions of how "the streets" are portrayed and connected with characterological figures presnted as real and rooted. I discuss this point more in Chapter Five.

do so in part by drawing on elements of prior performances and recontextualize them in the current performance.

One example of this phenomenon from my own research comes from the use and reuse of stock phrases during improvisational and pre-planned raps. These culturally salient phrases often incorporate spatialized practices which index not only a particular connection to place, but the meanings associated with the characterological figures connected to this socially-constructed place. For instance, artists in Houston sometimes use the phrase "drank by the pint, 'dro by the pound," where "drank" is a codeine-laced drink and "'dro" refers to hydroponically-grown marijuana. "Sippin' drank" is a social practice anchoring the performer to the spaces where this act takes place, spaces which include various levels of granularity (street, block, 'hood, side, city). This social practice is also associated with the characterological "street figure" in local hip hop. Thus, by recontetualizing the stock phrase "drank by the pint, 'dro by the pound," artists sediment the place of this phrase in the repertoire of practices available to Houston artists to fashion a certain kind of street subjectivity. This repertoire includes using the phonological variables embedded in the phrase we've been considering: The word "drink" is pronounced "drank," "pint" as "paint," and "pound" monophthongally as [pa:nd].

It is worth noting that through the recontextualization of small stretches of discourse, hip hop artists lay down a social history of stylistic acts, connecting various domains of signification (non-linguistic social practices, rhetorical positioning, stock phrases, phonological variables) with specific conceptions of localness vis-à-vis personae such as the characterologically-salient "street figure." In the next section, I discuss these

processes in greater detail, focusing on the intertextuality of style and the Russian-doll-like relationships among different domains of signification mentioned above. It is through the repeated use of these smaller bits of discourse that sociolinguistic style, in part, conventionalizes.

3.3 Producing Texts and Relations: Intertextuality and Textual Practices

So far, I have laid the foundations for investigating style as a fundamentally intertextual phenomenon, involving the processes of "decontextualization" and "reconextualization"[12] (Bauman and Briggs 1990:74). These processes, described in greater detail below, are fundamental to a concept introduced in Chapter Two, namely, bricolage. As I described in §3.1.2, bricolage involves drawing on some form of semoitic resource and adapting it in a local context. In this section, I briefly focus on some of the mechanics underlying this process as it relates to (linguistic) style. Specifically, I examine how phonetic variables and other stylistic elements crystallize and in turn serve as meaningful resources for future self-presentation. This process ultimately depends on the relationship between the deployment of stylistic material in one context and subsequent re-deployment of this material in a new context, that is, on the recontextualization or recentering of these resources.

What I aim to unpack in what follows consists in the nature of these "resources," what they comprise in terms of their semiotic texture, and how component elements of these sometimes subtle and minute textual practices facilitate their detachability or, to use Bauman and Brigg's (1990) term, decontextualizability. From a single word produced in its cotextual surround to stock phrases and rapped couplets, I consider how, through

[12] More on this below.

repetition and consistency, these "texts," or rather their deployment in textual practice, become transportable, reiterable (Bauman 2004, Coupland 2007), and thus recontextualizable. With a nod to Bauman (1996), Hanks (1996), Irvine (1996), and Urban (1996), Coupland (2007) notes that is throught this process that "[c]ulture...lays down or 'sediments' texts, which in turn realise the culture." In other words, social actors "entextualize" (Bauman 2005, Bauman and Briggs 1990) elements of discourse, lifting them from their discursive surround whilst preserving some of the pragmatic force that these elements imposed through their use by particular social actors, in specific situations, to similar interactional ends. It is this pragmatic resonance that sediments alongside the formal dimension of textual practices, through continuity in their pragmatic conditions of deployment.

That is, the laying down of a "social history" (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 2003:53) of style involves employing textual practices – potentially comprising various semiotic elements – across instances of use in a similar way, toward similar ends, by speakers taking up similar stances. It is through these intertextual relations among instances of use, what Hill (2005) refers to as an "intertextual series," that elements of linguistic and nonlinguistic signification come to "hang together" (Coupland 2007) formally, as well as cohere in a socially-meaningful way. To present a more fine-grained exposition of how these processes unnfold, I turn now to a brief discussion of entextualization as it relates to the conventionalization of style.

Entextualization, as Silverstein and Urban (1996) note, involves transforming some element of culture into a durable but flexible "object," transportable across

contexts, and useful for future acts of self-presentation. Bauman and Briggs (1990:73) describe entextualization as

> ...the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting. A text, then, from this vantage point, is discourse rendered decontextualizable. Entextualization may well incorporate aspects of context, such that the resultant text carries elements of its history of use within it.

One example of this process from the sociolinguistic literature comes from Schilling-Estes' (1998) research on the "Ocracoke brogue." In this work, the author examines the use of Ocracoke island dialect features in performances of "a distinctive dialect which residents and outsiders often call 'the brogue.'" (Schilling-Estes 1998:54) Central to her analysis, as Schilling-Estes (1998:54-55) points out, is the examination of "stock phrases that highlight island features, including the highly salient prduction of the /ay/ diphthong with a raised and backed nucleus...which has come to characterize the Ocracoke, or "hoi toider" (i.e. 'high tider') dialect." One such stock phrase is "It's high tide on the sound side," a "formulaic utterance" which, as Schilling-Estes (1998:56) notes, "appears to be a common saying in Ocracoke."

Central here is the observation that the stock phrase in question is in local circulation, that is, it has been rendered recontextualizable across occasions of use. And as Schilling-Estes points out, these occasions of use include performances of the local dialect for outsiders. The formulaic phrase "high tide on the sound side" is particularly

well-suited to this task, as it contains the local variable /ay/, providing speakers with what Coupland (2007) refers to as a "phono-opportunity" to exploit the associations of phonetic variants through performance. In this case, the speakers in Schilling-Estes' (1998:56) study draw on a stock phrase containing phonetic variants to "'lay the brogue on thick' for tourists," using it to "mark their identity as 'authentic islanders.'"

Returning to the notion of entextualization vis-à-vis the conventionalization of style, several aspects of the case Schilling-Estes describes helps illustrate how phonetic variables are embedded in and bootstrap off of more salient and complex linguistic material, here lexical items themselves embedded in a stock phrase used within rhetorical moves to assert one's authenticity as an islander. In this way, we observe a set of relations captured by the Russian nesting-doll metaphor: phonetic variables are embedded in lexical items, which in turn are embedded in a culturally-loaded formulaic phrase used in the rhetorical strategy of asserting one's legitimate indigeneity.

Key to our goal of understanding how style – particularly its phonetic dimensions – conventionalizes through performance is the observation that submorphemic elements, such as phonetic variants, play a role in the process of entexutalization through which more formally complex elements of language, such as salient cultural terms (Coupland 2007, Mendoza-Denton 1997, Zhang 2008), are rendered decontextualizable and thus recontextualizable, bringing with them facets of the pragmatic conditions surrounding their previous occasions of use, such as laying claim to a local authenticity.

Another example of this process discussed above comes from my own research on Houston hip hop. As I noted in §3.2.2, Houston artists sometimes use the stock phrase "drank by the pint, 'dro by the pound" both to connect their personae to specific places

(e.g. the South Side) and to evoke characterological features of specific personae associated with lived experience in these places. Relevant to our current purposes is the striking nesting-doll relationships we observe in this example. Just as in the case Schilling-Estes (1998) describes, the half-couplet stock phrase "drank by the pint, 'dro by the pound" contains phonetic variables, /I/ pre-engma and /aw/, providing artists with an opportunity to exploit several layers of signification – phonetic variation, lexical items, and a stock phrase – to fashion a particular kind of street subjectivity through the rhetorical force associated with this phrase and the semiotic elements it carries.

What this example, as well as the Ocracoke example, helps illustrate is how the intertextuality of style often involves layers of embedding through which less salient elements – such as submorphemic material – may bootstrap off of the pragmatic prominence of more formally complex and entextualized elements of language[13]. In other words, elements such as phonetic variables, which one would be imagintive to call "texts," get swept up in processes of intertextual sedimentation through both mundane and spectacular performances. Key especially in the latter case are the factors of frequency and circulation, as well as markedness or cultural salience. The use of stock phrases by prominent Houston hip hop artists has implications for the circulation of these small texts among the community of listeners who not only consume local hip hop, but also memorize and recite the lyrics of this music. Hip hop music, as a highly-circulated cultural medium, makes possible the continual recontextualization of small texts. Through repetition and, as Irvine (2001:22-23) notes, consistency in form and function, these texts and the semiotic layers which comprise them come to form an intertextual

[13] Woolard (2009) describes a similar process which she terms "the semiotic house that jack built." Zhang (2008) and Mendoza-Denton (1997) also discuss similar processes, the latter referring to certain elements of language may become a "magnet for variation."

series (Hill 2005) across occasions of use, laying down a social history of stylistic practices which both constrains and enables future uses of stylistic elements in both mundane and spectacular performances.

It is in these ways that we can connect spectacular performance to the conventionalization of stylistic practices, including the deployment of phonetic variants. Salient figures, who I describe in the next section as social icons, draw on culturally-salient lexical items and stock phrases which have pragmatic force owing to their prior occasions of use. Recontextualizing these elements constitutes a textual practice which potentiates cultural continuity and sediments – both formally and functionally – the relationship between stylistic elements themselves and their indexical potential vis-à-vis the circumstances under which these elements of style are used. Such circumstances include the relationship between what is said, how its said, and by whom.

In the next section I explore this last relation, namely, the sociolinguistic significance of the speaker or performer in terms of his or her position within various forms of social hierarchies. As we shall see, these social actors wield influence and are consequently in a position to circulate and sanction stylistic moves and innovations. It is in this respect that examining social icons proves crucial to an understanding of the forces undergirding the conventionalization of style.

3.4 Social Icons: Who Makes Style?

If stylistic practices prove primarily to conventionalize and flourish in situations where salient social groups are in contact and conflict, that is, in cases where distinction vis-à-vis social groups is foregrounded, it stands to reason that, in order to gain some

understanding of the social functionality associated with style, we must undertake the study of what distinguishes one group (or subjectivity) from another. That is, one route to understanding how style comes "to mean" resides in the exploration of the social groups with which style is (in)directly associated. It is here that we reach the nexus between individual and group. For to examine the contours of a socially-differentiable collectivity empirically requires an examination of such a group's internal dynamics, including hierarchical structure and positions of power and influence within the collectivity. In Eckert's work (2000, 2005), the primary level of social organization examined is the community of practice, and with a focus on this construct comes a view directed toward members of these communities who embody the values and orientations of the group or collectivity.

These individuals, or as they've been called, "iconic speakers" (Mendoza-Denton 2008:210) or "local icons" (Eckert 2001:125-126), stand out as extreme representatives of a particular social formation, such as T-Rex in Mendoza-Denton's (1997, 2008) work on Latina gang youth or Judy in Eckert's (2000) seminal work on Burnouts and Jocks. Mendoza-Denton (2008:210) defines iconic speakers as follows: "Iconic speakers are socially salient individuals toward whom others orient, and who become salient and imitated as a result of their exterme behavior, centrality within the group, and broad social ties." The author continues, noting that "These factors give them [iconic speakers] greater weight in the definition of styles." (Mendoza-Denton 2008:210) Some of these qualities attributed to social icons require unpacking.

For instance, Mendoza-Denton (2008) notes that an individual's position within a group, what she calls "centrality," proves key to such a person's ability to make, ratify,

sanction, or reject stylistic moves. The status social icons attain puts them at the center of social intercourse and conflict, and the moves they make become synonomous with socially-differentiable – we may argue stereotypic – configurations of stylistic practices and the stances and orientations these practices index. Returning briefly to the spatial metaphor of understanding an icon's "position" within a group, it is worth citing Eckert's (1989, 2000) work on burnouts, in which the author talks of a "social landscape" (2000:217) that speakers orient to in understanding what the use of particular stylistic practices means. Part of this landscape, in fact what she calls "clear places in the linguistic map," are social icons:

> As speakers reach out into the sociolinguistic landscape, interpreting what they hear in terms of whose mouth it is coming out of, there need to be clear places in the linguistic map. This map is populated not only by iconic variables, but by iconic speakers. (Eckert 2000:217)

In this way, iconic speakers enjoy a position from which they shape stylistic practices and their meanings by virtue of the high status these invidiuals hold within particular social groups or collectivities. That is, social or stylistic icons are uniquely positioned to (re)contextualize and circulate stylistic practices within their sociocultural milieu. It is owing to the influence wielded by social icons that these speakers, as inviduals, give shape to the social collectivities within which they participate. As Mendoza-Denton (2008) points out, the status of social icons potentiates imitation of their stylistic moves, and their broad ties to other social groups facilitates the circulation

of these social practices, juxtaposing them with the orientations and positions taken up by the social icons with which these practices are associated.

It is in this way that group style comes to cohere formally and meaningfully through the salient deployment of social practices by iconic representatives of social groups. And it is the iconic speaker who effectively gives shape to what it means to participate in a social collectivity by providing a "spot on the map" for others to orient to, a subject position made meaningful through the attribution of stances and orientations to this way of being. The interlinking of subjectivity, social formation, and stylistic repertoire turns around and provides social actors with the means to communicate a sense of collective identity, especially useful in situations where establishing one's membership or affiliation with a particular social formation is crucial, as in the case of Latina gang youth, described by Mendoza-Denton (1997, 2008), or the case of metal music subculturalists, described by Brown (2009). And because of the indirect nature of the link between these signifying acts and those with whom they are associated, such acts may in turn function to evoke social meanings associated with the stances taken up by iconic speakers. In this way, social icons play a role in shaping the indexical potentials of stylistic acts within and outside of the social formations in which they participate.

In this dissertation I examine popular, established Houston hip hop artists as stylistic icons in the social domain of Houston hip hop music as a local field of cultural production, including established and aspiring artists, deejays, various media, and others who comprise the local listenership[14]. These established artists fit the criteria discussed above for iconic status as wielders of influence positioned on the front lines of Houston

[14] My focus in the dissertation won't be on how things go down nation-wide, but mostly what's happening in Houston.

hip hop and located centrally within the social structures which comprise (Houston) hip hop's institutions of cultural production. It is in this way that such artists are in a position to shape the sociocultural boundaries of a local hip hop style and subjectivity. As mentioned in the previous section, established Houston artists, as iconic figures, play a central role in circulating stylistic practices, including the deployment of salient lexical items and stock phrases which contain phonetic variables. In other words, popular rappers perform as purveyors of local style, circulating cultural practices – including the deployment of various layers of signifiers – locally and nationally among their audience and the general field of hip hop cultural production and consumption. Significant here is the perspective we take on social organization and the flow of cultural materials. It is to a brief discussion of this topic that I now turn.

3.5 Social Organization and Circulation

In the case of established Houston artists and their music, what we must come to terms with is the flow of cultural materials and practices through macro-level institutions of distribution and replication, including the radio, TV, and those people and organizations responsible for producing the material artifact – be it a CD or MP3 – which is then put into rotation and mass circulation. In other words, in considering the role of hip hop artists in circulating and sanctioning stylistic practices, we are focusing on complex orders of social relations, including the roles played by a range of people – often strangers to one another – in bringing recorded hip hop performances from the studio to the radio to your bedroom. It is in this respect that we are dealing with a macro-level phonemenon, one which involves complex orders of social relations spanning space and

time, and one which results in the distribution of material artifacts to a substantial audience. Looking at the conventionalization of stylistic practices requires that we take such a macro-level view, as the circulation of spectacular performances involves various facets of the culture industries and their related institutions.

As noted earlier, though, the primary level of social organization examined by scholars such as Eckert (2000), Mendoza-Denton (1997, 2008), and Bucholtz (1999) is the community of practice, or CofP, a by and large micro-level unit of social organization. What's at issue here is the nature of circulation and conventionalization vis-à-vis different resolutions of social organization, the more macro and the more micro in scale. In the approach to style associated with the Stanford tradition, processes of stylistic conventionalization have primarily received attention through the lens of the community of practice, and thus have focused on the local dynamics of stylistic differentiation, with an eye to the more immediate exigencies of social interaction as it unfolds in day-to-day practice. Zhang (2008, 2009), by contrast, adopts the aims of the Stanford approach to style while focusing on the broader sociohistorical concerns surrounding the emergence of a unique, cosmopolitan Beijing style and subjectivity. In Zhang's case, TV shows and the media play a role at the macro level in connecting stylistic practice with ways-of-being and circulate these representations to a broad audience.

Discussing Zhang's case brings us to the point at which macro-level processes articulate with the micro-level uptake and potential transformations such representations undergo as they are further sedimented through local adaptation. Indeed, TV shows, movies, magazines, and other forms of mass communication draw on iconic performances by iconic speakers at the local level to create widely-circulated

(re)presentations of such performances. In other words, the macro and micro are intimately connected in a socially-reflexive way: The culture industry reaches out into everyday life to obtain sources of entertainment, sources which often pre-exist their mass-circulation. Subsequent processes of circulation brings stylistic practices and the discourses which give them substance to a wider audience and set of contexts, providing opportunities for recontextualization of stylistic practices at the local level.

In this dissertation, I examine the conventionalization of style – including the processes which connect stylistic acts with widely-interpretable social meaning potentials – from a macro-level perspective by analyzing the performances of established Houston hip hop artists, as well as media accounts of these artists. I connect this more macro-level approach with the micro-level of everyday interaction through my ethnographic account of socialization and self-promotion at a Houston radio station. It is by examining the circulation and policing of stylistic norms at different social resolutions that I provide an account of the interlinking processes at work in the conventionalization of style and its political implications, including those surrounding notions of authenticity and indigineity. In the next section I discuss how the growing literatures on language and place, in sociolinguistics, and space and place, in anthropology, provide points of departure for examining macro-level processes which circulate images of local authenticity. Specifically, I explore the ways stylistic practices and subjectivities become associated with particular experiences of places, and how these stylistic practices enter into the work of representation by "erasing" (Gal 1989) or excluding other ways-of-being as less locally authentic.

3.6 Indigenizing Style

3.6.1 Language and Place: Some Preliminaries

Place has long played a prominent role in the study of language variation, constituting a central concern of dialectologists whose interests have centered around the differences in language we observe geographically, areally, as one travels from one "region" to another. Driving this line of research is a belief that place by and large functions as an objective, independent variable in determining or at least mediating the forms of language we observe across geographic space. As Johnstone (2004:65) points out,

> [p]art of the standard account of the origins of regional dialects in Europe, for example, is that physical boundaries such as rivers and mountain ranges gave rise to communicative isolation of one group of speakers from another, upon which once common ways of talking diverged.

In the contemporary first world, however, movement from one place to another becomes common (Eckert 2004), and finding "authentic" speakers, representative of local ways of speaking, proves not only challenging, but potentially misguided, as efforts to find speakers untouched by modernity and outside influence marginalizes a great deal of many populations.

Returning to the proposition that place functions as an independent, objective variable vis-à-vis language variation, sociolinguistic researchers including Eckert (2004) and Johnstone (2004) have questioned this assumption, comparing it to similar assumptions which have been rejected or problematized in recent years. For example, Johnstone (2004:65) suggests that "we tend to assume that identifying where someone is,

where someone is from, and who else is from there is unproblematic because the relevant criteria are objective and categorical." However, as Johnstone continues, research on class and ethnicity, such as Eckert's work on Jocks and Burnouts and Bucholtz' work on race and high school students (1999, 2011), has demonstrated that categories such as class, ethnicity, and gender prove best approached ethnographically, as "emic, culturally defined categories." (Johnstone 2004:66) Central here is the idea that these facets of social life – class, ethnicity, gender – are non-componential, that is, they overlap in complex, interdiscursive ways and depend in large part on the ramping up of individual acts which accumulate over time to reproduce such macro-level constructs. Scholars including Johnstone (2004) propose that we approach the relationship between place and language in much the same was as we view the relationship between gender and language, as grounded in some physical reality but nonetheless elaborated on in complex ways and, ultimately, as socially-produced concepts which are subjective, manifold, mulitplicitous.

In this section I examine such a view of the relationship between language and place in reviewing both sociolinguistic and anthropological conceptions of place which seek to retheorize this concept, locating it in a more contemporary context. This review includes examining how people imbue or inscribe space with meaning, transforming it into place. (Low and Zuñiga 2003:13) Thus we approach the ideological dimension of place as a social construction, as a normative construct (Low and Zuñiga 1003) that, in the hands and mouths of those who have access and wield influence, reduces the multiplicity of experiences and voices connected to place to one hegemonic, normative perspective on such things as "Texanness" (Johnstone 2004, elsewhere), or what it means

to be a native of Michigan's Upper Peninsula (Remlinger 2009). As we shall see, these spatialized ideologies potentiate what Low and Zuñiga, drawing on work by Certau (1984), term "spatial tactics," a concept I will expand on later by examining how hip hop artists – amongst other social actors – reproduce, challenge, and reshape ideas about what it means to be *from* a particular place.

Among the strategies available to social actors for such purposes, this section focuses on rhetorical, discursive tactics of essentialization which narrowly circumscribe spatialized subjectivities, such as "yinzers" (Englebretson 2007), "yoopers" (Remlinger 2009), "Geordies" (Beal 2009), or Houston hip hop artists. As we shall see, these discursive strategies conflate a range of semiotic practices and social orientations in producing a unique, reified, relation to place, a relation I shall refer to in this dissertation as indigeneity. Thus, extending this term, we may propose that social actors indigenize symbolic practices and orientations through essentializing acts which transform domains of semiotic practice and social life into singular visions of place in terms of what counts as representative, distinctive, authentic experiences of these places. It is through such processes that styles become enregistered (Agha 2003, 2007), a process by which semiotic material and practices become systematically coordinated with one another, sharply differentiated from other regimes of style, and deployable to enact or reject spatialized qualities associated with this style.

In discussing processes of enregisterment, we again return to the issue of power and representation, specifically the matter of which people are in a position to portray indigeneity in singular, marginzalizing terms, and how these people and the institutions in which they participate circulate portrayals of authentic localness or nativeness. I discuss

in some detail the political implications of these processes, particularly in the case of what Low and Zuñiga term "contested spaces" (Low and Zuñiga 2003:18), a notion which the authors define "as geographical locations where conflicts in the form of opposition, confrontation, subversion, and/or resistance engage actors whose social positions are defined by the differential control of resources and access to power." This control of power, especially the power to circulate representations of nativeness or indigeneity, potentiates opposition to dominant representations of relations to place in terms of authenticity.

Such opposition stems from the fact that social spaces such as cities, neighborhoods, or even broader regions are typically "multilocal" and "multivocal." (Rodman 1992) Therefore in cases where different social groups have a stake in the construction of social space both materially and symbolically, conditions prove rich for the use of counterhegemonic strategies to reframe localness in terms alternative to its dominant construction. In my research on Houston hip hop, I examine how established artists, themselves oftentimes portrayed as marginalized vis-à-vis dominant mainstream white culture, effectively marginalize a subset of Houston artists through their own spatialized essentializing rhetoric.

In other words Houston, as a site for producing hip hop music in the broader U.S. and world market, proves a locale rich for examining issues of contesting space – spatial representations particularly – among one broadly-construed social group, rapppers. Thus, the discursive struggle over indigeneity in Houston hip hop provides fertile ground for examining the undertheorized multivocality and multilocality of this domain of cultural production (though see Forman 2004 for a critical exception). Before approaching this

issue, I first turn to the task of exploring how sociolinguists and anthropologists have conceptualized space and place and the processes by which these constructs are inscribed with social meaning.

3.6.2 (Re-)Theorizing Place and Language

As Johnstone (2004:66) points out, citing Entrikin (1991),

> For most of the twentieth century, geographers envisioned place as "the relative location of objects in the world" (Entrikin 1991: 10). Place in this sense...is physical, identifiable by a set of coordinates on a map; one place is different from another place because it is in a different location and has different physical characteristics.

By and large, as noted above, this perspective of place, or something approaching it, has tacitly informed research on language and place, including contemporary sociolinguistics. In recent years, however, sociolinguists and anthropologists have interrogated this attempt at an objective conceptualization of space, opting instead to examine the ways in which social actors "transfom space into place," (Low and Zuñiga 2003:13) a subjective construction which often proves multiplicitous and contested. Anthropological approaches to place in this vein, as Low and Zuñiga (2003:13) suggest, "are interested in how people form meaningful relationships with the locales they occupy, how they attach meaning to space." The authors continue, noting that these approaches to place "are interested in how experience is embedded in place and how space holds memories that implicate people and events." (Low and Zuñiga 2003:13)

Key to our purposes is the notion that "space hold memories that implicate people and events," (Low and Zuñiga *ibid.*) for this proposition involves the semiotic dimension of place. Here place, whether indexically or metonymically, holds the potential to evoke sociocultural elements associated with their spatial environs. In other words, through processes of memorialization – including enregisterment – shared knowledge of place arises and enables social actors to invoke place discursively, calling upon the associations and inscribed experiences which imbue place with meaning and potentiate its use as an intersubjective tactic for self-presentation.[15] One facet of the meaningful assocations between physical space and social experience is, as Low and Zuñiga point out, the "meaningful relationships with the locales [that people] occupy." (2003:13) Important here is the idea that people form relationships with spaces, as it is by viewing one's experience through a spatial lens that social actors not only invest space with social meaning, but also tether themselves to these socially-meaningful places through relations including nativeness, rootedness, localness, and indigeneity.

These labels function to characterize particular relations to place, such as "Texanness" (Johnstone 2004) or, in Houston hip hop, the interlinked spatial relations of "hood" and "street." In each case, a particular way of being-in-the-world is tied to the spatial, conflated to the extent that "hood" may refer to an actual place, such as someone's neighborhood, or the attitudes and orientations of people associated with that place. That is, "hood" may function as a metapragmatic sign (Agha 2007), as a noun or modifier, which evokes qualities connected to particular lived experiences of place. Thus we may talk of a hood, or someone being or acting hood, as place and experience meld symbolically through the inscription of place with social meaning.

[15] I examine this in greater detail later in this section.

It is by experiencing specific places in certain ways that we come to "attach values to space through social and personal experiences, and culturally as a conceptual model," (Low and Zuñiga 2003) that is, incscribe place and our relation to it with meaning. This inscription may take form through a variety of means, including our own reflection on place through everyday conversation and stories. As Low and Zuñiga point out though, "[t]he inscription of place with meaning is not limited...to telling stories, but can include poetry, music, and songs" (Low and Zuniga 2003:17) It is through these cultural practices – including spectacular performances – that we create enduring frameworks for understanding particular places and our relations to them.

It is worth pointing out here that these frameworks reflect interest-laden perspectives on place, and therefore enter into the "work of representation" (Stuart Hall 1997) through the ideological production of authenticity vis-à-vis place. We, as social actors, may jointly orient to one socially-circumscribed space as our home or hood, such as Houston or the Sunnyside neighborhood on Houston's South Side. In this respect, places such as Houston or Sunnyside are both "multilocal" and "multivocal" (Rodman 2003 Low and Zuniga 2003) in the sense that the experiences which characterize life there are mainfold, diverse, as are the voices which give substance to these spatial constructs. However, what it means to be from Houston or Sunnyside involves public discourses of indigeneity, including those found in hip hop music, which effectively essentialize the relation between person(a) and place.

This process involves a rhetoric of authenticity which promotes certain experiences as truly representative of particular places, associating everyday practices linked to place – including language use and variation – with an ideology of loclaness

which subsequently marginalizes experiences of place and practices which do not fit this mold. Citing Steven Gregory's work (1998) Low and Zuñiga (2003:24) point out that dominant, essentializing discourse may link the spatial with a unilocal, univocal experience of place, mapping the collective experiences of place asscociated with a subsection of its inhabitants onto that place in such as way as to render these experiences unequivocally representative and authentic. It is in this way that those who are in a position to influence discourses of place may marginalize inhabitants who cut a figure different from the one portrayed as stereotypicallly representative of place. This ideological linking of certain ways-of-being with particular places through public discourse both enables and constrains how social actors orient to place symbolically. As Johnstone (2004:69) points out, "[b]ecause places are meaningful, place is normative." Thus, people seeking to lay claim to a relation to place such as indigineity or nativeness in some measure orient to dominant discourses of place, either drawing on and extending such discourses or somehow subverting or rejecting them. In the next section I examine how ideologies of indigeneity both constrain and enable the spatial dimensions of self-presentation.

3.6.3 Spatial Tactics: Enabling and Constraining the Spatially-Relational

Drawing on the influential work of Michel de Certeau (1984), Low and Zuñiga (2003) discuss the strategic use of place through what they term "spatial tactics." The authors note that "[b]y 'spatial tactics' we mean the use of space as a strategy and/or technique of power and social control." The examples they go on to cite largely involve the material dimension of space, specifically the ways in which those in power structure spaces such

as classrooms, buildings, and cities in order to establish and maintain power dynamics which disadvantage some and empower others. In my own research, I examine how the physical layout of the radio station where I did fieldwork, as well as the emergent spaces which arose there through regular social gathering, both limited and afforded different types of access to forms of hip hop circulation, including rotation on the radio as well as in the CD player of someone's car parked in front of the station.

My primary interests in spatial tactics, however, lie in expanding the scope of this term to incorporate the tactics used by social actors who parcel out and imbue with meaning the physical world in which they live. These tactics include drawing on the metonymic and indexical force that place evokes in order to take up a particular subject position associated with place. For example, as I describe below in discussing Eckert's (2000) work, burnouts make use of urban-oriented symbolic practices in order to position themselves as street-smart and edgy. Such acts ramp up into more durable structures for communicating relations to place, in some cases a potently-narrow nativeness, producing the discourses of local authenticity discussed in the previous section.

In this section I briefly examine how social actors orient to and exploit ideologies of place for purposes of self-presentation. I begin by discussing examples which illustrate how social actors employ spatial tactics in the semiotic domain by drawing on shared ideas about nativeness vis-a-vis such places as Texas, the American South, and urban Detroit. In these cases, speakers exploit the indexical potential of semiotic practices to evoke not only affiliation with socially-constructed space, but also to evoke qualities associated with lived experiences of such spaces. It is in these ways that social actors establish indigeneity and all that comes with it.

In her work on suburban Detroit high school students, Eckert (1989, 2000) discusses at length the significance of space and place in the experiences and mundane performances of the students she studies. Though Eckert discusses the layout of the high school and how different social groups utilize and imbue with meaning these spaces in distinct ways, I shall focus here on her analysis of the symbolic dimension of the burnouts' urban orientation. For these students, Eckert (2004:47) argues, "[l]anguage is part of a broader semiotic system that includes such things as clothing, territory, musical taste, activities, and stances." She continues, noting that "[t]he burnouts' urban orientation emerges in the use of symbols of street smarts such as wallet chains and symbols of urban affiliation such as Detroit jackets and auto factory jackets." Thus students employ elements of material culture to communicate their orientation to the extra-local environs of urban Detroit, a place Eckert notes that the students regard as somewhat dangerous. It is this quality of Detroit and a vision of lived experience there which lends symbolic meaning to the use of spatialized material culture by burnout students.

Important to note here is the potential for interpretability in the case of employing urban symbols; their effectiveness depends in some measure on shared ideas among the students – burnouts, jocks, and in-betweens – regarding the meaning of wearing, for example, an auto factory jacket or chain wallet. In other words, Detroit, lived experience there, and the symbolic practices which evoke a sense of this experience hold the potential to communicate social meaning, a sense of danger or edgyness, as well as orientation to the urban setting of Detroit. These practices also enable the burnouts to

construct symbolic distance from the suburban high school setting where they employ these tactics for positioning themselves relative to the urban-suburban dynamic.

Also at the disposal of burnout students for evoking meanings associated with lived experience of Detroit is the conventionalized repertoire of urban sociolinguistic variants. As discussed in Chapter Two, students deploy these variants in tandem with elements of material culture for the purposes of self-presentation. Regarding the relationship between language and material culture, Eckert (2004:47) writes "[t]here is a seamless relation between...visual symbols and the burnouts' use of urban variants of the late stages of the Northern Cities shift." Thus, in the case Eckert describes, burnout students draw on the conventionalized repertoire of symbolic tactics – including the use of language and other elements of material culture – to enact social personae consonant with an edgy urban subjectivity, symbolically distant from the suburban setting of their high school and those who orient to it ideologically. In doing so, these students further sediment forms of collective identification and the meaning potentials such forms evoke.

It is in this way that burnout students link place with persona(e), indigenizing burnout style through overt displays of affiliation with "the urban," such as wearing jackets with embroidered emblems for Detroit sports teams or auto factory jackets. This latter use of classed material culture offers insights into the kind of relation to place that the students affect symbolically, namely, a working class subjectivity. Thus Detroit functions in the symbolic economy Eckert describes metonymically and indexically to evoke a particular kind of lived experience, a classed experience of place.

It is this kind of singular experience of place that Johnstone (1999) discusses in her work on the use of Southern-sounding speech among Texan women. Johnstone

(1999:513-514) notes that one speaker, Terri King, "draws on one specific model for southern femininity, the model of the 'Southern Belle,'" including the speech style associated with this model. As Johnstone notes, King is a telephone salesperson who exploits the Southern Belle trope in order to sell mailing lists over the phone. King remarks "'It's hilarious how these businessmen turn to gravy when they hear it [i.e. "Southern Drawl"]. I get some of the rudest, most callous men on the phone, and I start talkin' to them in a mellow Southern drawl, I slow their hear rate down and I can sell them a list in a heartbeat'" (Johnstone 1999:505, citing Stevens 1996:E1).

When she asks how Southern Belles talk, Johnstone (1999:514) elicits responses from Texan women which include "higher-than-usual pitch, a wider-than-usual intonation range, and exaggerated facial and hand gestures, in addition to trying to sound polite, tentative, loquacious, and cute." She also notes that the monophthongal pronuciation of /ay/, "at least in the pronouns *I* and *my*, is almost invariably part of the performance, even for speakers who find the variant difficult to produce." (Johnstone 1999:514) In this way Johnstone provides evidence for shared knowledge of a particular lived relation to place, the Southern Belle figure, which proves inextricably linked with stylistic practices ranging from the kinesic to the linguistic, including phonetic and suprasegmental features.

These stylistic practices thus serve as semiotic spatial tactics for women such as Terri King, who claims that "her 'Southern Drawl' can be turned off and on as needed" (Johnstone 1999:514) in order to effect a specific lived relation to place conducive to establishing rapport with potential customers. Studies such as Johnstone's provide us with examples of cases where conventionalization is already underway, and social actors

exploit shared knowledge of what has been conventionalized – a specific, lived experience of place and the style which communicates this experience – for rhetorical purposes, for self-presentation. In other words, collective ideas about what it means to sound a certain way evoke social meanings associated with characterological figures, such as the Southern Belle. These figures represent what we might call a narrow nativeness, in that social knowledge of them requires some measure of essentialization in delimiting the social-semiotic boundaries of such a figure. Knowledge of what it means to act and sound like a Southern Belle turns around and serves as a resource for women such as Terri King who exploit the indexical potentials of this style to rhetorical ends[16]. It is in this way that indigenized style functions as a symbolic resource – a spatial tactic – for those who employ it.

Thus we see from Eckert's (1989, 2000, 2003, 2004) work on burnouts, and Johnstone's (1999) research on the use of Southern speech by Texan women, that social actors draw on conventionalized relationships between lived experiences of place, place itself, and the style which evokes both place and experience, in order to fashion selves conducive to their rhetorical aims. This indexical use of place vis-à-vis style captures what I mean in using Low and Zuñiga's (2003) notion of spatial tactics, strategies adopted by speakers to evoke qualities linked to stereotypic or characterological figures associated with place. Returning to the theme of conventionalization, the use of these spatial tactics across similar contexts, and toward similar ends, further sediments their place as conventional resources for fashioning selves by evoking the imagery associated with specific relations to place, relations narrowly circumscribed through the

[16] Knowledge of such norms may also be exploited for rhetorical purposes, as in satire. I discuss this at some length later.

essentializing processes of enregisterment. In the next section, I examine the growing enregisterment literature with an eye to understanding how specific ways-of-being become linked to place – as *representative* and *distinctive* of place – through macro-level processes involving the print media and other forms of material circulation of cultural objects and practices.

3.7 Enregistering Local Style: Circulation and (Vernacular) Norming

I begin this sub-section by returning to Jonstone's (2004:69) quote, cited earlier, which proposes that "[b]ecause places are meaningful, place is normative." In previous sub-sections, I have talked some about how we inscribe places with meanings. I have also touched on the ideological dimension of this process in underscoring that not all experiences of place become incorporated in a schematic understanding of indigeneity, including which stylistic practices come to function emblematically as indexing a particular connection to place. Key here is the phrasing "particular connection," as it evokes the configuration of a sociocultural margin and center. Returning to Johnstone's quote, place is normative precisely because social actors rhetorically position particular experiences of place as representative and distinctive. The result is an essentialized indigeneity, as social actors present certain chateristics or qualities – including those of speech – and particular kinds of personae as iconically representing life in a given place, such as the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) of Michigan (Remlinger 2009) or "Aggieland" (Johnstone et al 2002).

In this sub-section I examine how the literature on enregisterment informs our understanding of how and why certain experiences of place, as well as the personae and

styles iconic of these experiences, get swept up in the work of representation, in processes of indigenization. What is at stake in such processes is the meaning of place. By speaking of the meaning of place I attempt to capture the ways that places come to evoke the social meanings associated with iconic types of people who become viewed as representative of these places. Examples would include Aggie fans for Aggieland (Texas A&M University) or cowboys for Texas. Central here is the idea that only some experiences of place, and thus some meanings associated with place, become part of a rhetoric of indigeneity. That is, certain types of people, experiences, and the styles evokative of them, become linked with a widely-circulated rhetoric of nativeness or indigeneity, despite the fact that experiences of place are multiplicitous and may vary in extreme ways. As a result, people who do not fit a narrow mold of nativeness find themselves at the margins of a rhetoric of indigeneity.

It is in this regard that indigenization is fundamentally a political process, involving power asymmetries in terms of access to means of representation and circulation (Remlinger 2009). Such means include processes including commodification of place (qua hegemonic representation) and the circulation of these spatial representations which tie a narrow range of experience to an idea of local authenticity. As we shall see, the result of these processes is a sociocultural circumscription of indigeneity, which ultimately configures the center and margins of nativeness or indigeneity in a given place. In the next section on contested spaces, I explore the effects that these processes have in a setting where more than one group seeks to lay claim to a local authenticity.

Before discussing these effects, I explore the question of why certain experiences of space become socially-differentiated, recognizable, and imitable in the first place. As we shall see, the reasons for this involve situations where distinct social groups not only come into contact, but also compete for resources associated with place, including place identity itself and the ability to lay claim to a localness or spatialized authenticity. It is in this way that the notion of "contested spaces" (Low and Zuniga 2003:18) becomes relevant to our current purposes. Returning to the notion of enregisterment, we shall see that processes of enregisterment, including commodification, circulation, and consumption, set the stage for conflict by empowering one group or subjectivity over another (or others). It is in this respect that places may be viewed as contested sites, locales over which social groups struggle to control sociocultural representations. As it is through processes of enregisterment that groups in power create indigenized "regimes of representation" (Hall 1997) which potentiate marginalization, I turn now to a discussion of the notion of enregisterment as it has been used in the literature.

3.7.1 Defining Enregisterment

As Adams (2009:115) notes, enregisterment – as a theoretical construct – is relatively recent, introduced by Agha (2003) in his article titled "The social life of cultural value." In this article, Agha aims to expose the processes by which language varieties – including RP in his case study – become socially-differentiated and valorized. This last point merits further discussion, as it is Agha's (2003:232) goal "to draw attention to...social processes – processes of value production, maintenance, and transformation – through which the scheme of cultural values has a social life, as it were, a processual and dynamic existence

that depends on the activities of social persons." What Agha is after ultimately is to understand the historical processes which give rise to a variety of language that is recognized by speakers as distinct from other varieties and therefore different in terms of the cultural meaning potentials or social indexicals these enregistered varieties evoke.

In other words, Agha's focus is on both the formal dimension of register formation as well as its historical-pragmatic dimension; that is, the constant valorization and revalorization of enregistered language varieties. Thus enregisterment, as conceptualized by Agha, is a process which includes the formal differentiation of registers (or what I have been calling styles) and the diachronic processes whereby such registers or styles come to evoke social meanings. The potential styles hold to evoke such meanings derives from their indexical linkage with speakers who employ these styles and the stances such speakers take while fashioning selves stylistically. Thus, in one sense, what we have is a bottom-up scenario in which the acts of individuals ramp up into larger frameworks, structures such as styles and the ideologies which give them meaning potential within broader symbolic economies. It is this ramping up of individual acts that Agha (2003:232) alludes to in suggesting that the social life of a register depends "on the activities of social persons, linked to each other through discursive interactions and institutions."

Though Agha (2003, 2005, 2007) does not focus specifically on the spatial dimension of the enregisterment of regional or local dialects, recent work along these lines (Adams 2009, Beal 2009, Johnstone 2009, Johnstone et al 2006, Remlinger 2009) have adopted enregisterment as an explanatory construct in investigating the ways that dialects – conceived of in the traditional sense as language varieties associated with place

– become enregistered through a range of metasemiotic processes, including metalinguistic discourse, the commodification of dialect features, and the circulation and consumption of such commodities. These studies share an interest in examining how imagined communities, such as the "Yoopers" of Michigan's upper peninsula (U.P.), draw attention to the distinctiveness of their indigeneity, oftentimes in the face of contact with other communities or varieties.

One striking example comes from Remlinger's (2009) work on the enregisterment of a local style in the U.P., where locals orient to Michigan in carving out their place identities. However, as Remlinger (2009) notes, Yoopers distinguish themselves from other Michiganders who live below the peninsula, or "under the bridge." (Remlinger 2009) Some inhabitants of the U.P., Remlinger argues, orient not to extralocal norms, but rather the reified social figure and label Yooper as a spatialized subject position. As Remlinger (2009:119) notes regarding the term Yooper, "the toponym symbolizes the notion that dialect is tied to a particular place and a certain group of people." The author continues, proposing that "*Yooper* also embodies cultural values associated with the area, as proclaimed by a bumper sticker that readers 'Yooper it's not just a word, it's a lifestyle.'" (Remlinger 2009:119) Thus we see the interlinking of personae and lifestyle, which as Remlinger argues, includes elements of local vernacular language use.

Important to note before continuing is the phrasing Remlinger uses in describing the ideological dimension of dialect, as being a variety "tied to a particular place and a certain group of people." In the case of the U.P, Remlinger suggests, what it means to be local has to do with what it means to be a Yooper, including a wide range of orientations which give meaning to this subject position and a repertoire of signifying practices which

function to index its unique localness, "Yooperness" as it were. I turn now to a brief description of the social conditions and processes by which style and subjectivity become linked to a singularizing vision of place, that is, how dialect becomes enregistered.

3.7.2 Conditions and Processes: Contact, Distinction, Labeling

As I suggest above, some form of social contact ultimately sets the stage for the enregisterment of a style. This contact ecompasses actual social intercourse, the interaction between different social groups, as well as knowledge of extra-local norms, facilitated by institutions of socialization including the mass media and schools. Through these forms of socialization, people such as the inhabitants of the U.P. develop what Remlinger (2009:118) terms "dialect awareness," knowledge that the way one talks differs from the speech of others vis-à-vis sociolinguistic norms, such as those enforced through schooling or other types of socialization. The production of what we might alternatively term "stylistic awareness" opens a space for creating distinction by asserting the legitimacy of one's (marginalized) style in relation to dominant ideologies of stylistic norms.

For example, as Remlinger (2009) points out, the people of Michigan's upper peninsula demonstrate awareness that the way they speak differs from the speech of other Michiganders, who sometimes mistake so-called Yoopers for Canadians because of the overlap between certain Canadian speech forms and those asscociated with Yoopers. This misrecognition is captured by the lyrics to a U.P. song titled "The Transplant Song:" (Remlinger 2009:118-119)

1 I was sitting in a Detroit bar DIS guy he says to me

2 You must be from Canada, Newfoundland maybe

3 No I said, your slightly off, as I pointed with my beer,

4 I'm from up above the mitten, this place over here.

5 I still wear my swampers and I drive my beat up truck (original emphasis)

The lyrics to this song help throw into relief some key issues surrounding notions of indigeneity in Michigan. The singer clearly orients to Michigan as home, as we see in the penultimate line ("I'm from up above the mitten," i.e. Michigan's mainland). However, the singer's fellow bar patron mistakes the accent for that of a Canadian, perhaps from a distant part of Canada. This misrecognition points to the norms that a citizen of Detroit may orient to in judging what it means to sound like someone who is from Michigan, and as the song suggests, the variety spoken by Yoopers doesn't fit this dialectal mold.

One of the most striking features of the excerpt above is the evidence it provides for a political struggle over definitions of local identity. To the Detroiter, the Yooper sounds Canadian. However, as the Yooper suggests, he is from Michigan too. What's at issue here is what it means to be from Michigan when two differing perspectives on the matter are brought into contact. Bringing these perspectives on indigeneity into contact produces some measure of conflict, giving the Yooper an opportunitiy to assert not only his indigeneity, but the distinctiveness of this indigeneity as something "still" Michigan but definitely not Detroit.

In other words, we see here a case in which one social actor imposes a set of sociolinguistic norms on the identity of another actor, who in turn questions the

narrowness or legitimacy of such norms which give the Detoiter reason to believe that someone who speaks like a Yooper is Canadian. In doing so, the Yooper from the song asserts not only his indigeneity as a Michigander, but also the distinctiveness of this indigeneity, calling upon cultural signifiers associated with the U.P., including the lexical item "swamper" (a kind of boot) and the fortition of /Φ/ ('dis' instead of 'this'), as well as the image of a "beat up truck" and its driver.

Thus the song functions to open a space for a multiplicitous indigeneity, or at least to challenge the hegemony of a Detroit-centered indigeneity which marginalizes alternative experiences of Michigan. As we shall later see, Hip Hop artists make use of songs to question the legtimacy of narrowly-circumscribed ideologies of indigeneity by directly challenging these ideologies or through the veiled critique of parody. Important here is the role that performance plays not only in negotiating socio-spatial boundaries and identites, but in sedimenting these boundaries, including what it means to be a Yooper from Michigan. As we shall see presently, social actors also employ metalinguistic discourse to delineate the semiotic boundaries of indigeneity, including which linguistic features are conceptualized as local and how they are locally valorized.

Key here is the role that metasemiotic acts, including metalinguistic discourse or "talk about talk" (Remlinger 2009), play in producing and reinforcing shared knowledge regarding stylistic and dialectal norms. These metasemiotic acts play a central role in enregisterment by turning a reflexive eye to contact situations in addressing and sometimes playing up difference. It is through these reflexive acts – through which social actors reflect on differences between themselves and 'others' – that certain ways-of-being-in-the-world become enregistered, including dialectal features. This process hinges

on the reflexivity that modes of interaction such as metalinguistic discourse afford social actors. And it is this reflexivity which ultimately engeders socio-semiotic differentiation.

Remlinger provides several examples of reflexivity in sociolinguistic interviews and the print media which function to enregister certain local dialect features. In one case, for example, Remlinger (2009:125, emphasis original) cites an interview with a 14-year-old girl to illustrate a feature of Yooper speech which has undergone enregisterment: "A lot of people from the UP say HEH after everything, like THAT WAS FUN, HEH. I haven't heard that anywhere else." As Remglinger (2009:125-126) notes,

> Discursive features related to people and place, "a lot of people from the UP," and dialect, "I haven't heard that anywhere else," simultaneously establish local identity and reinforce the notion that there is one, common dialect spoken by residents of the Copper Country. Likewise, this talk about talk metadiscursively functions to maintain associations among local identity, place, and dialect.

Thus, through the small excerpt above, we catch a glimpse of the processes at work in circumscribing localness in semiotic terms, here through the use of the discourse marker 'heh' and its discursive connection to a spatially-anchored community of speakers ("people from the UP"). Moreover, as Remlinger points out, talk about talk, such as the quote cited above, helps to "establish local identity and reinforce[s] the notion that there is one, common dialect spoken by residents of the Copper Country." (Remlinger 2009:126). In other words, metalinguistic discourse functions to create among communty members not only a singular sense of localness, but a belief that there exists one shared

repertoire which members of this community, that is, inhabitants of the UP, employ in everyday conversation to construct this localness.

Key also in the short excerpt above is the sense of distinctiveness with which local ways of being and talking are imbued. As the young woman interviewed declares, "I haven't heard that [='heh'] anywhere else." (Remlinger 2009:125). Thus, for this young women at least, and putatively for members of the imagined community of the UP to which she orients, the discourse marker 'heh' has come to take on a distinctive quality in relation to ways-of-speaking in surrounding areas. That is, turn-final 'heh' – itself the reflexive object of a discourse of indigeneity – functions as the lexical item "swampers" does in "The Transplant Song," to evoke a singular sense of place, a narrow nativeness. Important to note here is that excerpts such as the one we've been discussing not only provide evidence for enregisterment of certain forms but also further sediment these forms, drawing attention to them as indices of a specific kind of localness. It is in this way that metalinguistic discourse functions to further sediment beliefs regarding the connection between local ways-of-talking and ways-of-being.

As Johnstone et al (2002, 2006), Remlinger (2009), and Remlinger et al (2009) argue, metalinguistic disourse functions most potently as an agent of enregisterment when utilized in widely-circulated forms of material culture, such as newspapers, bumper stickers, posters, and coffee mugs. As Johnstone et al (2002:148) suggest,

> Pittsburghers tell each other over and over, in newspaper cartoons, editorials, and articles, on t-shirts and refrigerator magnets, and in occasional explicit public debate about the role local speech should play in

> local life, that "real Pittsburghers" say "dahntahn" for downtown, "aht" for out, and so on.

Key here is the way that authenticity, place, and language articulate. As the authors suggest, it is through the circulation of materials which promote a particular kind of localness that social knowledge is produced and maintained regarding what counts as authentically local. One example Johnstone (2009) presents in detail is the case of dialect commodification through the use of local lectal features on T-Shirts which explicitly link place and language, reifying this relationship in declaring what "is" and "is not" 'Pittsburghesese.' Johnstone (2009:157) describes one such T-Shirt as follows:

> The front of the shirt depicted the city's skyline with words like pop, redd up, keller, hans, and sammich superimposed on it. On the back was a dictionary-like list of words and phrases with definitions and sample sentences. "This," he told us, holding up the shirt, "is Pittsburghese."

Such material artefacts not only illustrate the processes by which particular dialect features and even subjectivities become linked to a rhetoric of local authenticity, but also provide evidence for the sedimentation of these associations. In the the example Johnstone describes, this process of sedimentation has reached the point of reification, where locals have named a variety they reflexively envision themselves speaking: Pittsburghese. Thus, as regards the enregisterment of this variety, we observe an advanced situation in which the culture industries have played a role in giving some sense of fixity to the variety in question by reiterating its name, providing examples of it, and

connecting elements of this variety to a singularizing rhetoric of indigeneity. In this respect then we may talk of Pittsbughese as an enregistered, named variety.

In other cases, however, the degree to which elements of a particular variety are reflexively thought of to "hang together" (Coupland 2007) may differ, and the variety itself may not be named. Such is the case Remlinger (2009) describes regarding the variety spoken by Yoopers, which itself has not been reified to the extent that Pittsburghese has in that the toponym 'Yooper' describes a subjectivity, not specficially the variety spoken by Yoopers.[17] Important to note here is that enregisterment is a process which involves gradual degrees of sedimentation and ultimately reification through which particular varieties come to be socially-differentiated from others. Thus, depending on the circumstances of the case under study, we may observer different degrees of fixity. As Eckert (2004:41) notes, "our everyday interpretation of the actual use of variability is rich with types and personae—styles that we might identify as New York Jew or California surfer, but mostly styles that we interpret but have no name for."

Central here is the idea that we may orient to styles and personae which themselves have no name. Though they have not undergone advanced-stage processes of reification, however, does not render these styles and subjectivities any less real or present. Remlinger's (2009) study demonstrates that this is the case, as do countless other studies which examine styles which have no socially-agreed upon label (Eckert 2000, 2004, Podesva 2008, Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995 *inter alios*), but which nevertheless function as resources for social actors.

What unites unnamed and named varieties undergoing processes of enregisterment is their ideological dimension and singularizing nature. As we saw earlier,

[17] One could imagine such a case though, speaking 'yooperish' or simply 'talkin' yooper' etc.

one pre-requisite for enregisterment is contact and potentially conflict between two or more ways-of-being and the ways-of-speaking associated with them. In such cases, some social groups or institutions controlled by these groups play their parts in portraying certain ways-of-being – including linguistic practices – as authentically local. In doing so, these groups and institutions marginalize experiences of place which do not fit this mold. It is here that the notion of contested spaces becomes relevant again. As ideological constructions, collective experiences of place – fictual, elaborated, or actual – come to function discursively as regimes of spatialized representations, linking notions of realness and place through an essentializing rhetoric of what it "means" to be from a particular place. This essentialization sets the stage for conflict, especially in cases where playing up one's place identity is not only valuable, but expected, as in hip hop. In the following chapter I examine how established hip hop artists in Houston, Texas, essentialize a local subject position and the style associated with it in playing up the distinctiveness of Houston in the broader national and international economies of hip hop music and the cultural industries.

Volume II

Power to Represent: The Spatialized Politics of Style in Houston Hip Hop

Christopher Michael Taylor

Chapter Four

Indigenizing Houston Hip Hop:

Linking Style with Place at the Macro and Micro Levels

4.1 Rap Music in Houston: Lay of the Land

4.1.1 Introduction: Rap-A-Lot Sets the Stage

As hip hop journalists have noted (Sarig 2007, Sonzala 2006), the American South is, in historical perspective, a relative newcomer to the national market for rap music. Hip hop scholarship (Rose 1996, Ogbar 2007) has established the place of New York and surrounding urban centers on the East coast as the point(s) of origin for what is now arguably the dominant field of global youth cultural production (Ogbar 2007). Gaining momentum in the East, hip hop spread West to California in the 80's with the success of artists such as N.W.A. ("niggaz with attitudes") from Compton and Too $hort of Oakland. As hip hop began to flourish from East to West more than two decades ago, young men and women in Houston took notice of this burgeoning cultural force, first adopting the new musical form "as is," orienting to the extra-local norms of East and West coast hip hop. These norms included the sample-based, drum machine-driven beats (i.e. instrumental tracks) of East coast hip hop, as well as the cadence and delivery associated with performers from this region.

These early years of adoption and experimentation with hip hop music began by and large with the founding of Rap-A-Lot Records by Houston local James "Lil J" Prince in 1986 (Sonzala 2006). As Sonzala (2006:54-55) points out, Lil J saw the opportunity to

tap into the growing market for rap music, establishing a record label that scouted talent from "both sides of town," that is, the North and South sides of the sprawling city of Houston. It is in some of the early acts signed by Rap-A-Lot, inlcuding Raheem and Royal Flush (Matthews 2010, Sarig 2007), that we see not only experimentation with a non-indigeneous cultural form, but also the first taste of national exposure with the distribution deal Rap-A-Lot secured for the release of Raheem's *The Vigilante* (Sarig 2007). By and large though, as some of the pioneers of early Houston rap music have themselves noted (Matthews 2010), the early days of hip hop in "H-town" were inflected by the East coast style of rap music music which functioned as a catalyst for local hip hop cultural production. It would take years of experimentation with hip hop for Houston rappers to carve out a unique place for themselves among their East and West coast counterparts.

Leading this charge in the early days of Houston hip hop was a group signed to Rap-A-Lot who eventually settled on the name "The Geto Boys." As Sonzala (2006:55) notes, the group's release *Makin' Trouble* "was the first full-fledged album from Rap-A-Lot Records," and their sophomore album *Grip It! On That Other Level* put Houston on the map in the world of hip hop, garnering initial attention from major labels based on the East coast. The Geto Boys first release in 1985, *Car Freaks*, prefigured much of what was to come from Houston artists by incorporating car culture – central to citizens of a city sprawling nearly 80 miles one direction – into the lyrics and general aesthetic of Houston rap music. Subsequent releases including *Grip It! On That Other Level* and *We Can't Be Stopped* brought images of Houston, including its car and drug cultures, as well as other material dimensions of Houston's landscape, to a broader audience.

Key to the success of these releases and their effect on establishing a localized hip hop aesthetic was the do-it-yourself (DIY) model adopted by Rap-A-Lot's CEO Lil J, a model which local artists (Matthews 2010) suggest was born out of necessity, owing to the lack of interest shown by major labels during the early years of Houston hip hop. Because of the local success enjoyed by Rap-A-Lot during these years, Houston artists were positioned to focus on "doing Houston" in their music, taking cues from local life instead of New York or California in crafting a tradition which set the stage for other up-and-coming artists to develop their own DIY models for producing local rap music. Among these artists, arguably no person played a greater role promoting Houston's image than local DJ Screw, whose persistence, DIY sensibilities, and wildly-popular mixtapes gave a distinctive voice to artists from the Southside of Houston and paved the way for further innovation by Northside artists. Through his signature slowed-down mixtapes[18], Screw opened the door for a generation of artists, lending a distinctive sound to a growingly-reflexive Houston rap culture centered around a local cultural geography of the "North" and the "South"[19] sides of the city. It is through the music of Screw and his stable of artists that we begin to witness the birth of a distinctively-Southern hip hop subculture reflecting the interests and values of local artists. As Sonzala (2006:57) suggests, "Screw created a new sound for the South and a revolution in and of itself."

4.1.2 Mixtape Culture: Screw, Michael Watts, and Local Rotation

Born Robert Davis Jr., DJ Screw began this revolution modestly, creating and selling his signature mixtapes from his house in South Park (Sarig 2007). Several qualities set these

[18] More about this in the next section.
[19] These have less to do with cardinal directions, more to do with cultural construction...

mixes apart from what other DJs were doing during this time. First and arguably most importantly, Screw distinguished his mixtapes by slowing the tempo of the music down considerably, a practice which took the name of its creator: "Screwing down" a mix or a track. Regarding the appeal of this practice to Houston hip hop subculture, Sarig (2007:315) says the following:

> Slowing records down was a simple gesture, but it created a hazy, dreamlike effect that people liked. It turned upbeat hip-hop into the kind of slow-riding pimpin' music the South had loved for decades. Some like the way it enabled them to better hear the words and sonic elements in songs. And many screw fans felt like the hypnotic pace complemented the dulling effects of their choice drug – codeine syrup. For all these reasons, Screw's mix tapes established screw music on the Houston underground.

By slowing down his mixtapes Screw did more than establish his presence in the Houston scene. He lent a distinctive sound to Houston rap music by building a group of artists known as the Screwed Up Click (SUC) who rapped over the instrumental tracks DJ Screw blended together. This facet of Screw's sound brings us to the second way in which his mixtapes differed from other tapes circulating at the time: These mixes provided local Southside artists an opportunity to showcase their lyrical talents, particularly their ability to "freestyle" or rap improvisionally, producing unscripted performances which demonstrated the artists ability to "come from the top of the dome," a phrase expressing one's ability to improvise rap lyrics.

We thus observe two ways in which DJ Screw laid the foundation for a distinctive Houston style. By providing a platform for local artists to perform improvisationally, Screw helped cement the "off the top" rapping style which came to characterize Houston hip hop both locally and nationally through a distribution deal secured with the major record label Priority Records. Moreover, by slowing down the tempo of the finished mix, Screw helped shape a sound which would distinguish Houston artists from not only East and West coast artists, but also other Southern artists from cities such as Atlanta and Miami who rapped over faster rhythms. As Sarig's long quote above suggests, this slower pace appealed to users of codeine cough syrup (also know as syrup, oil, or lean), a drug which itself became emblematic of Houston rap music through releases such as Big Moe's *City of Syrup* (Sarig 2007:319), which featured the billboard hit *Barre Baby*, a song which promoted not only the "syrupy" dimension of Houston rap music, but also other facets of local hip hop culture. Among these dimensions, car culture and fashion feature prominently in the lyrics of the SUC, specifically the practice of driving "S.L.A.B.s" (i.e. "slow loud and bangin'"), cars that have expensive after-market sound systems, custom rims for the tires, and custom "candy" paint jobs.

Some of these elements of Houston hip hop culture are appealed to in the following passage from Big Moe's *The Barre Baby*:

1 Time to ball and parlay,
2 Time to smoke hay,
3 Time for Versace shades,
4 Make my trunk wave...

The first line of this passage contains the phrase "ball and parlay," the verb 'ball' meaning to flaunt the resulting success of often illegal activities, including selling drugs, as well as one's legitimate success in the "rap game." The term "parlay," putatively making its way into local vernacular through the Louisiana French term "to talk," captures the act of casually commiserating with one's friends. The second line contains a reference to another facet of local drug culture, "smoking hay" or marijuana. In the third line, Big Moe cites the practice of wearing designer sunglasses, and in the fourth line we observe another reference to car culture, here the popular practice of "swangin' and bangin'," or driving one's car slowly in an "S" curve with the radio playing loudly.

Thus, in these two short couplets, we witness how Houston artists display and construct local knowledge of hip hop culture in promoting a distinctive image of the lifeworld reflexively constructed through the circulation of rap music, in particular music which plays up what makes hip hop culture in Houston different from other regional scenes. It is through the combination of this spatialized rhetoric and its circulation on Screw mixtapes that a subcultural center emerges. This cultural center includes the repertoire of social practices – including those linked to drug culture, fahshion, and car culture – which give form to popular local hip hop style, as well as the street-oriented subjectivity associated with these practices.

It is in this way that Screw and his group of MCs played a central role in cementing what it means to this day to lay claim to a Houston place identity, or "represent," in local rap music. In later sections I explore how a series of major record deals in the mid 2000's further shaped the aesthetics of Houston rap music, helping sediment a semiotic framework for "doing Houston" in local hip hop. Before describing

this period in the history of Houston rap music, I turn first to a discussion of the Northside's contribution to local hip hop culture, a contribution pioneered largely by another DJ: Michael Watts.

As Sarig (2007:323) notes, "[w]hat brought screw music to the mainstream was neither DJ Screw nor the Screwed Up Click, but rather Screw's more media-savvy, crosstown rival-turned-successor, Michael '5000' Watts." What led to the popularity and success of Michael Watts' mixtapes, Sarig (2007) suggests, is the fact that Watts hailed from the Northside of Houston. Until this point, Screw music primarily featured South Side artists who made a habit of disparaging Northside hip hop. Sarig (2007:323-324) suggests that

> With Watts, [Northsiders] finally had one of their own to provide the slowed-down sounds they'd come to love. Also, Watts had no interest in Screw's homemade style and direct sales – he put his stuff on CD from the start, used Pro Tools and digital CD mixing for higher fidelity, and sold his mixes in stores.

Through these strategies, Watts was able to reach a wide audience, including a wider range of local listeners through his relationship with and participation at the only local hip hop radio station, 97.9 "The Box." Central to Watt's success in spreading "the Houston sound" (Frere-Jones 2005) was the role he played in promoting his own stable of Northside artists by featuring them on his "screwed and chopped[20]" mixes. These mixes afforded Northside artists such as Slim Thug, Chamillionaire, and Paul Wall an

[20] "Chopping" a record refers to the practice of playing doubles of the same record slightly off-sync, alternating between them so as to create the effect that certain elements of the song are repeated.

opportunity to represent their side of the city, further sedimenting social practices shared with Southside artists such as "smoking dro[21]" and "sippin' lean" (i.e. codeine), as well as promoting distinctive culutral dimensions tied to life on the Northside, such as putting Dayton rims on one's tires instead of blades (a type of rim associated with the Southside) and wearing braids in one's hair instead of the signature "Southside Fade" haircut.

Despite these semiotic differences between Northside and Southside artists, Michael Watts and his "Swisherhouse" group of rappers played a key role in promoting a rhetoric of indigeneity in their music which helped sediment a collective repertoire of signifying practices emblematic and evokative of lived experience in Houston. Through collaboration with Southside artists, this repertoire came to represent a more unified vision of Houston hip hop culture as something distinct from cultural forms associated with other regional scenes. Moreover, through a series of record deals secured by the Northside artists named above, Michael Watts' collective firmly cemented a Houston style of rap at the national and international levels, further circumscribing the social-semiotic boundaries of a local hip hop subjectivity.

In §4.3 I examine in detail how two Northside artists, Paul Wall and Mike Jones, directly engage in rhetorical processes of cultural boundary construction by rapping about local knowledge of hip hop cultural practices. It is through such rhetorical moves that a cultural center has emerged locally, a center which essentializes indigeneity in Houston hip hop. Before discussing the rhetorical processes which give rise to a socially-available semiotic framework for "doing local," I turn first to a discussion of Houston's re-emergence in the mid 2000's as a global force in hip hop music and culture.

[21] "Dro" is another slang term for marijuana, derived from the term "hyrdroponic."

4.1.3 National Spotlight: 2004-2006

With few acts being signed to major record labels, the national attention Houston hip hop initially garnered through Rap-A-Lot records and the Geto Boys had waned by the mid-2000's. This situation was soon to change though, as local and extralocal support of Houston rap music gradually built through the popularity of Screw and Michael Watts' widely distributed mixtapes. Based on this success, local artists such as the SUC's Lil Flip and Swishahouse's Slim Thug, Mike Jones, Chamillionaire, and Paul Wall soon attracted the attention of major record labels, with Slim Thug and Lil Flip signing major distribution deals in 2004. According to the RIAA database, *U Gotta Feel Me*, Lil Flip's third album, was certified platinum in August 2004, and Slim Thug's album *Already Platinum* was certified gold the following year.

Following several other record deals secured by Houston artists, one of hip hop's premier publications, *The Source*, released a front-page, center-spread feature titled "Don't Mess With Texas: Why Houston's Reign Won't Stop," (2006) focused on the growing national success of Houston's hip hop scene. This publication marked a milestone in the history of Houston hip hop, lending institutional credibility to the previously liminal local scene. Furthermore, The Source feature played a role in solidifying the Houston sound by highlighting the work of certain artists, particularly those associated with the SUC and Swishahouse. Interviews with these artists reveal what they themselves think of when asked to reflect on what makes Houston distinct. For example, as noted in the previous chapter, Mike Jones says the following regarding his album *Who Is Mike Jones?*: "*Who is Mike Jones?* was simple. It was about me being fly…I'm from H-Town. I sip lean. I ride candy paint. Grills in the mouth, diamonds

shining. I love where I'm from. I'm proud of that." (Sonzala 2006:61) Here, Mike Jones esentializes lived experience in and of "H-Town."

Jones' comment speaks to the ideas artists and other people involved in the production and consumption of Houston rap music have regarding what hip hop in Houston sounds and looks like, what social practices are closely linked with a rhetoric of indigeneity in the music, as well as what social personae or "figures of discourse" (Agha 2003) are portrayed as representative of hip hop cultural production locally. In other words, Jones' comments shed light on what it means to "do Houston" for both locals and nonlocals, putting on display the collective repertoire of social practices and symbols for which Houston has become well known. Importantly, such reflexive commentary in an internationally-distributed hip hop publication further cements the utility of specific social practices as a conventionalized framework for playing up a particular connection to place, a socio-spatial relation constructed through a rhetoric of indigeneity which essentializes place identity in Houston rap music.

The result of such essentializing discourse is, for some cultural commentators (Serrano 2008) and subculturalists, the crystallization of a stereotype, a narrow, interest-laden vision of Houston indigeneity in hip hop. Here what is at issue is the emergence of a (sub)cultural center, that is, a repertoire of signifying practices and the connection to their practitioners, both of which are portrayed as distinctively local. Regarding the emergence of a stereotype or cultural center, local artist Fat Tony[22] echoes Mike Jones' comments in the following excerpt:

[22] We learn more about Fat Tony later.

1 C Do you think there's a stereotype for Houston rap music?

2 FT Hell yes I think there's a stereotype

3 C What is it? How would you describe it?

4 FT Just the whole, scene of like you know, candy cars, grills, stuff like that. Like cuz like that was what was presented first for like Houston rap music. Like when that was from the, the Still Tippin' video came out, that was what the whole country thought of just Houston rap music, period. Like that was, so, so, they just look at that and like obviously every-everybody would sound like that to them, you know? [1.5] That's a, a big problem.

Here Tony notes the significance of Swishahouse's release *Still Tippin'* – which features Mike Jones, Slim Thug, and Paul Wall – in distinguishing Houston hip hop in the national market. The song cited and its accompanying music video feature numerous references to local social practices, such as "tippin' on four vogues" (i.e. four vogue brand tires) and "barre sipping, car dipping grand, wood grain gripping," (barre refers to codeine, and wood grain referring to the materials from which the steering wheel is made).

The video functions to further solidify the role of these practices and others in communicating a lived experience of place, featuring the artists and fans at a block party in a predominantly Black, working class neighborhood, engaging in social practices such as riding S.L.A.B.s, "swangin' and bangin'," wearing expensive gold and platinum chains, medallions, and grills. Furthermore, regarding the linguistic dimensions of self-presentation in the song *Still Tippin'*, we observe that, of the two phonetic variables

examined in Chapter Six (/aw/ and /i/ pre-engma), the artists almost invariably[23] deploy the monophthongal and lowered variants, respectively. For example, in the song, artist Paul Wall says the following:

1 I got eighty fours poking out,

2 At the club I'm showing out,

3 I'm a player ain't no doubt,

4 Hoes want to know what I'm 'bout...

The final word of each line in these two couplets contains the environment for /aw/ variation, and in each case the artist emphatically monophthongizes the variable (e.g. [a:t] for 'out').

It is in these ways we observe that, through the lyrics and visual language of music videos, artists connect lifestyle, place, and practices – ranging from the use of material culture and the deployment of sociolinguistic practices – in constructing vivid images of local life. As Fat Tony's quote above suggests, however, not all rappers identify with the experience of place portrayed as distinctively local in the music of popular Houston rap artists, including the song *Still Tippin'*. Among such dissenting artists are those who identify with street culture in their music, portraying themselves as 'hood,' but who also reject the narrow set of social practices ruled in as authentically local through the essentializing discourse of popular local rap music.

Such artists often appeal to an underground/mainstream dynamic, contrasting their "underground" style and social position with the conventionalized norms for communicating a sense of place associated with popular rap music. Here the contrast

[23] I discuss the quantitative results of a study based on the music of some of these artists in Chapter Six.

revolves in part around a discourse of authenticity which undermines the centrality of popular hip hop practices by questioning their desirability, portraying the deployment of these practices as gimmicky and repetitive. What is at stake in this case is a notion of realness or authenticity grounded in everyday practice, not simply in the music of artists seeking to reflexively stake out a place for themselves in a fiercely-competitive national market. It is this perspective of authenticity which undergirds what I describe as one underground/mainstream dynamic in Houston hip hop in §4.1.4.

I discuss another similar dynamic involving a discourse of underground vs. mainstream in §4.1.5, a dynamic which focuses on artistry, originality, and other elements of a hip hop tradition which traces its roots – oftentimes explicitly – to the so-called "Golden Age" (Ogbar 2007) of hip hop music, sometimes described as spanning the years 1988-1994. This dynamic differs from the underground/mainstream dynamic discussed in §4.1.4 in that hinges not on a discourse of realness grounded in a lived hood experience, but rather on a conception of realness or authenticity grounded in fidelity to the conventions and symbols associated with what I call the "hip-hop-as-art" discourse. Appealing to this discourse or tradition complicates issues of indigeneity and self-presentation for Houston artists, however, as the tradition itself is associated with extralocal norms. I briefly discuss the consequences of this conflict in §4.1.5.

I finish this main section by examiming what I describe as the post-underground current of Houston rap music in §4.1.6. What separates this current from that associated with the underground/mainstream dynamic of §4.1.5 is the rejection of this dynamic altogether in favor of a "wide tent" perspective in which popular rap music is seen as simply one facet of local hip hop cultural production. Artists I identify as participants in

this current avoid pigeonholing themselves as "underground" artists, either opting to reframe indigeneity in socio-semiotic terms conducive to their own experiences of place, or avoiding a spatialized discourse of authenticity almost altogether.

What each of these currents share in common is their orientation to popular Houston hip hop as a "regime of representation" (Hall 1997) which links images of a particular experience of place – namely that communicated through the music of the established artists discussed above – to notions of realness or authenticity. Each current approaches this regime or local stereotype differently, avoiding, rejecting, or reframing what it means to be "a real rapper" in Houston hip hop culture. Important to note though is that, in each case, what the artists do rhetorically and linguistically is mediated by the discourses of authenticity and indigeneity in the music of established local artists, discourses exemplified by excerpts examined above and those comprising the case study in §4.3. Before turning to the results of this case study, I first examine the three responsive currents of Houston hip hop described above, beginning with what I refer to as the "hip-hop-as-hustle" discourse which characterizes the first underground/mainstream dynamic.

4.1.4 One Underground, or What Houston *Also* Sounds Like

The term 'underground' as a metasemiotic sign (Agha 2007) has a complicated history in the music of Houston hip hop artists. As my research at the radio station suggests,[24] many subculturalists use this term to refer to music released independently of a major record label, involving an aboveground/underground dynamic. In such cases, artists use the term underground primarily to denote projects released through DIY models of distribution

[24] I explore this in depth later in §4.4.

and circulation, projects which depend in large part on local support. It is in this way that the term underground may function to signify an approach to doing local hip hop which in some ways is more connected with the audience who consumes the finished product. In other words, as one promoter at the station put it, artists who focus on a non-major, DIY model of distribution are more "rooted in the streets" than artists signed to major record labels, who are viewed as mainstream artists coforming to extralocal expectations regarding what Houston hip hop "should" sound like (i.e. artists rapping about candy paint, lean, and grills – the subcultural center in Houston rap music).

Important to note regarding the mainstream/underground dynamic under discussion is that the artists who evoke this dynamic – including Lil Flip on his *Undaground Legend* release and The Circle Gz in their song "The Underground" – still rhetorically position themselves as local, as Southern, as Houston artists connected with the streets. Underground from this perspective captures a lesser-mediated mode of hip hop production, one in which artists refuse to conform to the stylistic norms conventionalized through the essentializing rhetoric of popular Houston rap music. The effects of these hegemonic norms is illustrated through an interaction I had at the radio station with an up-and-coming artist Kritikal and his manager Will, illustrated in the following excerpt from my field notes:

> Nibu and Will talked about Kritikal's (K) two mixtapes, and Will said some interesting things in general about K. Will said he thought that K didn't really have a Houston sound on the first mixtape, and definitely not on the second mixtape. Basically the issue was that Will thought K wasn't

> doing things that appealed to Houston people specifically, and the South more generally. (10-3-2007)

Key in this excerpt is the idea that artists must "do certain things," such as evoke the social practices that established artists use to communicate a particular connection to place, in order to gain recognition from labels and, subsequently, fans who consume the widely-circulated products of these major labels.

At issue here is the working room artists are afforded regarding their creative individuality by a self-reflexive current of local rap music seeking to carve out a unique place in the national scene. The essentializing rhetoric of established hip hop artists creates a singularizing vision of nativeness vis-à-vis local rap music which marginalizes other approaches to "doing local." Such approaches include Kritikal's take on localness, one which rejects the recontextualization of social practices such as wearing grills as repetitive, gimmicky, and ultimately non-conducive with Kritikal's lived experience of place. These sentiments are captured in a line from Kritikal's song, "Reppin' Texas," in which the artists claims to represent Texas even though he doesn't wear a grill. Such lyrics point to the normativity of popular local hip hop style: Artists recognize that their own creative license to claim nativeness is mediated by a discourse of indigeneity which marginalizes experiences of place which do not conform to the norms constructed through the spatialized rhetoric of authenticity in popular local rap music.

Thus, we observe that artists such as Kritikal appeal to a discourse of mainstream versus underground hip hop in openly rejecting the exclusivity of popular hip hop style as the only way to "do local." Artists evoking this underground/mainstream dynamic often share in common with established artists a strong orientation to "life in the hood,"

including some overlapping social practices such as those associated with drug culture. Nevertheless, artists evoking a discourse of "underground rap music" in the context described above seek to distinguish themselves from the popular images of local life portrayed in the music of established artists. In this way we observe a subaltern, localized current in Houston rap music which strongly orients to a lived hood experience while simultaneously rejecting the symbolic norms associated with asserting one's connection to place in popular local hip hop.

Thus, this mainstream/underground dynamic focuses on alternative modes of establishing and communicating one's connection to place. Underground in this context therefore centers around different means of communicating somewhat distinct lived experiences of place. As we shall see in the following section, though, the term underground may also be used by and refer to another subcultural current which stands in opposition to both the underground and mainstream currents discussed above. In other words, to cite local act Drew Sparx, "you got two different undergrounds around here."

4.1.5 Another Underground

When asked about the term 'underground' and what it may signify, Houston hip hop subculturalists often point out that some artists and fans describe acts as underground based on the dynamic described in §4.1.4. However, the same subculturalists acknowledge the existence of an alternative underground/mainstream dynamic, one which centers around adopting traditional elements of hip hop culture as well as rejecting mainstream hip hop and the kind of underground rap discussed in the previous section. It

is this kind of underground/mainstream dynamic to which local producer Drewski[25] refers in the following passage (from an interview in 2004):

> You know you got two different undergrounds around here. You got the underground that's underground South and then you got the underground East Coast wannabes, pretty much. Because they think it's more creative, you know.

Here we see the significance of place in understanding what the term 'underground' may denote and connote. Drewski evokes the underground/mainstream dynamic discussed in §4.1.4 by reffering to artists as "underground South," that is, as off-the-radar in terms of major record label attention but nonetheless strongly oriented to life in "the streets," in the South, and specifically in Houston. However, when describing the subaltern underground, what Drewski later refers to as "the under-underground," we observe two perrenial descriptors used to characterize this "other" underground: 'East Coast' and 'creative.' In referring to "under-underground"[26] practitioners as "East Coast wannabes," Drewski touches on the sensitive matter of indigeneity and its relation to style. Before turning to a discussion of this relationship, I first briefly provide some background for the "under-underground" in Houston hip hop.

The term 'underground' has been used for years by artists from all across the United States – especially in the Bay Area (Harrison 1997), but also in Los Angeles (Morgan 2009), Houston, and elsewhere – to refer to a current in the national hip hop market in which artists adopt, incorporate, and evoke traditional elements of hip hop

[25] Drewski is local producer and one-half of the group Ump Music.
[26] In what follows, I will use Drewski's term to differentiate between the sometimes porous borders between the two different underground currents examined in this dissertation.

culture, including the so-called four elements of hip hop (break dancing, graffitti[27], MCing and DJing). These artists have historically labeled themselves and their music as underground, but the spatial metaphor does not here simply refer to the dynamic between commercially popular hip hop music and music with a cult following, like that of Screw and Michael Watts. Artists associated with this other underground current dismiss commercially popular rap music as well as popular unsigned artists as devoid of substance, overly-materialistic, and out of touch with hip hop as an art form, among other things.

Key here is the idea that rap music is art, and rappers reflect on this in and through their music. For such artists, the function or purpose of rap music as a cultural form is central, and these artists frequently engage in a stiff self-critique of the state of hip hop music (both locally and globally), much in the same way that the artists at Project Blowed in Los Angeles discursively police the boundaries of "the real" in hip hop (Morgan 2009). I term this self-reflexive critique a discourse of "hip-hop-as-art," in contrast with the "hip-hop-as-hustle" discourse which dominates much of popular rap music[28]. In this latter case, hip hop gives voice to the street hustler, providing a medium for the artist to extend his or her street hustling activities to "hustling" hip hop music; that is, instead of selling drugs, the artists hustle to sell records.

By contrast, MCs who invoke the "hip-hop-as-art" discourse, including nationally-popular acts such as Common in his song "I Used to Love H.E.R.[29]," focus their lyrics on examining the state of rap music and its fanbase. Such artists engage in a

[27] The term "backpacker" derives from the practice of carrying a backpack with spray cans in it, a common practice among under-underground subculturalists associated with writing or graffitti.
[28] Including what Drewski refers to as "underground South."
[29] Lyrics to this song can be found easily through an internet search.

form of power posturing through their lyrics, akin to that found in popular rap music, but differing in the basis for this posturing, revealed by their lyrics. For example, whereas some artists primarily emphasize their phsyical prowess and street-credibility, so-called under-underground artists often play up their lyrical prowess and the overall quality of their art. We see this emphasis in the following passage from Houston-based K-Otix's song "World Renown":

1 K-O taking the flow [=rap] to new dimentions,
2 Lyrically inclined to find intervention,
3 The next revolution in musical evolution,
4 Lyrcially exact with graphical resolution...

Here, artist Damien focuses his lyrics on K-Otix's music as art, as "[t]he next revolution in musical evolution." Such lyrics typify what I consider the ethos of under-underground hip hop, captured in the following words from an interview with one artist who orients to this current in local rap music: "We do it for the culture, to uplift.[30]" In other words, the function of rap music is to give voice to the rapper as artist, who in turn aims to push the envelope of artistry, advancing and uplifting "the culture."

In Houston, the under-underground current began in the mid-90's with acts such as Example and K-Otix[31], the latter signing a distribution deal in 2002 with New York independent label Bronx Science. Central to our current purposes is the role that place has played historically in this local adaptation of a cultural form originating outside of Houston. Returning to Drewski's exceprt above, we observe the significance of the

[30] This is from my field notes, not a recorded interview.
[31] Damien, one founding member of K-Otix, is one of the artists I work with in this study.

historical origins of hip hop cultural forms, developed in the 70s and 80s by subculturalists in New York. Artists seeking to adapt these forms to their local scene oftentimes have received criticism for trying to sound "New York," as we see from Drewski's characterization of under-underground MCs as "New York wannabes."

Here we return to the importance of the relationship between stylistic practice and indigeneity. In adopting stylistic and rhetorical practices associated with a cultural tradition originating outside of Houston, local artists face a problematic situation with regard to indigeneity. As I've discussed in previous sections, establishing one's rootedness vis-à-vis place is central to the aesthetic of the popular current of Houston hip hop music. In the case of under-underground hip hop, rootedness plays a similarly signifant role, but not in spatial terms. Rather, artists orienting to this current typically root their music and personae not to a specific place, but to a tradition that spans cities, locales, and time. It is this more universal quality of "hip hop as art" that Damien evokes in the following excerpt from "World Renown"

1 From the underground we're the world renown
2 D and the Mic with the verbs and nouns
3 ARE makes the beat comes down
4 K to the O *universal* sound (emphasis added)

In this excerpt we observe the rhetorical act of self-categorization, stancetaking in which the artist orients to the under-underground as a participant in this current of local hip hop cultural production. Involved in the process of portraying oneself as underground in this context are stylistic practices, practices which span semiotic modalities such as the

sartorial, the kinesic, and the linguistic. Crucial here are the associations these stylistic practices evoke, including associations with a tradition which, as mentioned above, originated outside the American South, in New York. For example, on the inner-cover art on the CD packaging from local act H.I.S.D.'s premier album, "The District," frontman Savvi is depitcted holding a pair of Adidas sneakers, wearing thick, black-framed "poindexter" glasses underneath his signature braids.

Though subtle, the simple act of holding a pair of name-brand Adidas sneakers evokes images of "old school" rappers from the East coast whose lyrics play up the centrality of wearing certain clothes – in this case Adidas shoes – in communicating their experience of hip hop culture (see for example, Run DMC's "My Adidas"). Such stylistic practices have become associated with the so-called "Golden Age" of hip hop and consequently the aesthstics of this era of hip hop production, including a focus on lyricism, lyrical innovation, and a dedication to advancing the culture of hip hop[32]. Interpreting these semiotic acts through a contemporary lens, acts including H.I.S.D and K-Otix (currently known as The Legendary KO) exploit the associations such stylistic practices evoke in fashioning personae conducive with the "hip-hop-as-art" discourse[33], ultimately orienting to and adapting extra-local traditions.

As I discuss in the next section and throughout the remainder of the dissertation, drawing on semiotic practices associated with extra-local norms poses a problem for artists with regard to laying claim to a local identity, as the practices exploited by such artists are rooted in the extra-local production of hip hop music. Consequently, acts such as K-Otix focus their rhetoric of realness and authenticity on a non-spatial rootedness, a

[32] Including a self-reflexive critique.
[33] I elaborate more on this in later chapters.

rootedness nonetheless based on a tradition with spatialized origins. It is in this way that such local acts align themselves with a less spatialized sense of rootedness and realness, aligning themselves with like-minded artists from other regions who share a commitment to the "hip-hop-as-art" discourse in producing music consonant with a collective perspective on the function of hip hop as a reflexive art form with a unique history and corresponding traditions.

Moreover, artists such as Damien of K-Otix use the label "underground" to describe and categorize not only their own music, but the music of artists who share an under-underground perspective on hip hop cultural production. Thus, through this current of hip hop music, the metapragmatic label "underground" has come to take on political meanings regarding the marginal place of under-underground hip hop in the commercialized, institutionalized rap music market locally and worldwide. These political meanings include taking a negative stance vis-à-vis the cultural viability of commercially-popular hip hop music (both local and non-local). In other words, claiming to be "underground" in this context amounts to a rejection of the aesthetics and values of commercially-popular hip hop. In the next section, I examine the problematic of adhering to some under-underground stylistic norms while overtly claiming a place identity which is potentially at odds with the origins of these norms in spatial terms.

4.1.6 Post-Underground Hip Hop in Houston

In the early 2000's, under-underground hip hop in Houston began to wane, as acts who identified with this current – portrayed oppositionally vis-à-vis "mainstream" hip hop –

began to reflect on the commercial viability of their music. Regarding this problem, Damien of K-Otix says the following (from an interview in 2004):

> Over the last year or so I've had to revise my thinking about the whole underground versus mainstream thing, because it pretty much became a good catchphrase for the last couple, few years, to you know to denote things as either underground or mainstream, for the sake of targeting a certain audience. And, I realize that a lot of those ["underground South"] guys, even the Swishahouse and Southside guys, didn't give a fuck whether they were underground or mainstream. They all just considered themselves you know just tryin' to get to mainstream, which from a professional standpoint makes sense. You want to try to develop your craft to appeal to the marketbase that will potentially pay you the most. Um, and...the whole mystique behind quote-unquote underground artists is that you do it for the love, it doesn't matter whether you get paid or not, which from a professional standpoint is actually kinda contradictory I feel. [...] And honestly, I'll be honest, most underground artists are that way – self-included – because they don't have the business drive I'll say to actually turn that into a profitable venture. Um, that's the difference, all these hardheads, Southside, Northside, they're looking to get paid, they're looking to make more money each time they step out and do something. So they'll do whatever. Underground artists are like, you know what, I'm not, I don't wanna come across as being like that, so I'll go ahead and do this show for free, I'll put on the best damn show that I have, that I can,

> and I'll let people respect me. But I don't want them to perceive me as being that person that's greedy for money. Which in reality as I've said it's counterproductive. And I've reached an age now where I'm like shit, I've been doing this for a long time and I've put a lot of work into it, there's nothing wrong with seeing rewards.

What's primarily at issue in this long passage is the value of hip hop as art counterposed with a perspective of hip hop as commodity. As Damien notes, under-underground artists have traditionally evoked the mainstream/underground dynamic in rejecting an approach to hip hop which commodifies it, focusing on the potential to earn money – hustling – through rap music. This sentiment resonates in the passage where Damien notes that most under-underground artists focus primarily on recognition as skilled MCs, and less on trying to make money.

It is here that we observe the discourses of hip-hop-as-art and hip-hop-as-hustle at odds: Under-underground MCs emphasize artistry over commodification, earning recognition over earning money. However, as Damien notes, this perspective disadvantages the under-underground MC with respect to making a living through their art. Since this current of hip hop developed as a response to the commercialization and commodification of rap music by big business, identifying oneself as sharing a vision of hip-hop-as-art and not commodity, that is, self-categorizing one's music as under-underground, aligns the artist with a stance toward rap music which is counterproductive with respect to earning a living through one's craft, as Damien points out in the passage.

It is for these reasons that Damien and other local artists who identified with the aesthetics, values, and overall perspective of under-underground hip hop began to

reconsider the consequences of labeling their music as "underground." Doing so effectively put the artists in a corner where making money through art was minimized and, in some cases, demonized. Thus, as Damien notes, using the underground versus mainstream "catchphrase" became less attractive to artists – especially younger artists – who identified with the values and aesthetics of under-underground hip hop but wished to earn a living through their art.

Additionally, as I've already noted, artists who in the past have aligned themselves with the under-underground current of hip hop have faced another problem with regards to establishing their indigneity while self-categorizing their music as underground in this context. As I briefly discussed in the previous section, the underground hip hop Damien speaks of has drawn on stylistic and rhetorical practices associated with a tradition of hip hop cultural production born on the East Coast. It is for this reason (among others) that local hip hop subculturalists have often associated under-underground artists with the East Coast, as we saw in Drewski's excerpt in which he refers to underground MCs as "East Coast wannabes."

Here again we return to the problematic relationship between style and indigeneity. As Damien suggests in the long passage above, from a business perspective, it makes sense to do things stylistically which appeal to a wide marketbase. In the case of local hip hop in Houston, appealing to this marketbase amounts in part to adopting stylistic practices which have become spatialized through the lyrics of popular Houston artists, such as sippin' syrup, wearing grillz, driving slabs, and "swangin' and banging.'" However, under-underground artists have by and large rejected these practices as representative of their lived experience of the city, promoting instead a different image of

what it means to "do hip hop" locally, in Houston. Fewer groups capture this sentiment better than local act H.I.S.D., an acronym borrowed from local public schooling (i.e. Houston independent school district). The group has transposed this acronym to communicate their unique experience of hip hop in the city, setting themselves apart in a number of ways, including through the alternative spelling of Houston as "Hueston" in the title of their group: "Hueston Independent Spit/Style/Soul District." As one member of the group told me in a casual conversation, H.I.S.D. aims to reframe what hip hop in Houston sounds and looks like, what its values and aesthetics are.

Taking a proactive step in controlling the semiotic representations of Houston hip hop is necessary for artists such as H.I.S.D. in a climate where engaging in social practices outside the normative repertoire of local cultural practices results in a type of misrecognition, through which local artists are portrayed as foreign, strangers at the gates of their own city. We see this misrecognition in the following excerpt from H.I.S.D. artist LdaVoice, in which he recounts the negative feedback received from his peers regarding the stylistic sensibilities of his art:

1 I heard people say I wouldn't make it
2 Cuz I wasn't spittin' like most of the South was with all the hatred
3 I guess a prophet won't be honored at home
4 Unless he ice grill, smoothed out, flippin the chrome
5 If you don't like me potna [=partner] you should leave me alone
6 But I'm a still rep my city till the day that I'm gone

The last line of this passage captures H.I.S.D.'s efforts to reframe Houston hip hop by openly "claiming" or "reppin'" (i.e. representing) their city, despite the conventionlized stylistic norms associated with a sense of place in the discourse of popular local artist's music, mentioned in the verse cited (e.g. ice grills, ridin' on chrome, etc.).

In step with like-minded acts, H.I.S.D. MCs do not draw on the underground/mainstream dynamic or self-label themselves as "underground." Instead, these artists seek to step onto the national stage, sharing it with popular Houston artists like Slim Thug and Paul Wall. What distinguishes the approach such artists take to carving out a spot for themselves in the local hip hop scene from the approach taken by artists who openly self-categorize their music as under-underground is the rejection of any singularizing view of what local hip hop should look and sound like. Instead, these artists opt for a multiplicitous view of indigeneity, one in which a variety of styles are viewed as representative of the diverse Houston hip hop scene.

In other words, artists such as H.I.S.D. seek not to frame in oppositional terms their music – its aesthetics and values – with popular local music, but rather they attempt to emphasize the heterogeneity of Houston hip hop. We observe this multiplicitous view in the following lyrics, taken from the song "The City" by H.I.S.D., in which artist EQ alludes to the hit song "Still Tippin,'" a track which helped put Houston rap music back on the map in 2004:

1 "Yall boys ain't on that typical mayne,"
2 Same road we just tippin from a different lane
3 Beautiful sides of an ugly game

4 H-town [ta:n] what a lovely twang

5 What it do now the whole world lovin our slang

In the opening line of this passage, EQ constructs a dialogue in which an unidentified "other" suggests that H.I.S.D.'s style and aesthetics are not typical of artists from Houston. Continuing from his own perspective, EQ cites Slim Thug, using a multi-laned road as a metphor which captures the possibility of heterogeneity and indigeneity in local hip hop: "Same road we just tippin from a different lane." Here EQ proposes that his group is also from Houston – same road – but they "do Houston" through their art differently, what EQ refers to as the "beautiful side of an ugly game." Such lyrics position the artists as *also* from Houston, but, as was the case in the previous two sections, not "on that typical" type of rap music which has come to characterize the local scene. In the same breath, EQ counterposes signifiers associated with popular Houston rap music – including the social practice of tippin' and the monophthongal variant of /aw/ – with a rhetoric advocating for a more open-minded perspective on Houston hip hop culture. It is in this way that artists such as EQ traffic in bricolage, recontextualizing small texts and even phonetic variation in order to create a broader space for understanding one's relation to place in and through hip hop music.

Because acts such as H.I.S.D., as well as local act Fat Tony, seek to avoid limiting their music through categorizing it as "underground," I refer to their broadly-conceived current of rap music as "post-underground hip hop." I choose this label to characterize and categorize local hip hop which emphasizes a mulitiplicitous view of both indigeneity and authenticity. It merits mentioning that this term was born out of my analysis of the political and symbolic economies of Houston hip hop culture, and it does not appear in

the lyrics of artists so categorized. Nonetheless, this label will prove useful in later chapters for making sense of structured variation in rhetorical strategies and stylistic practices deployed asymetrically by artists constructing personae which differ along a number of dimensions.

4.2 Conventionalizing Indigeneity and Policing Boundaries in Hip Hop

4.2.1 Overview

In the previous section I outlined the historical origins of Houston hip hop's emergent cultural center, as well as currents in local rap music which have arisen in response to the narrow rhetoric regarding indigeneity and realness prevalent in and definitional of the semiotic framework for "doing local" in popular Houston hip hop. In this section I examine some ways in which popular local artists construct and police the semiotic boundaries of a local subjectivity in Houston rap music culture through rhetorical and visual strategies. As we shall see, these strategies include reflexive acts such as self-categorization and emplacement – itself often a special case of self-categorization (e.g. "I'm from the South").

These strategies also include what I will refer to as metastylistic discourse, that is, speech about style. We have already seen examples of metastylistic discourse in some of the song lyrics cited above. For example, when rapper Paul Wall says "I got eighty-fours, poking out," the artist calls attention to his car, specifically the rims – eighty-fours[34] – on his car, which themselves communicate a specific experience of and perspective on place by means of their role in the repertoire of social practices called upon to convey this

[34] Rims originally found on 1984 model Cadillacs.

sense of rootedness. Such a rootedness centers around a relation to place characterized by a strong connnection to the hood – here specifically a working-class hood – including its aesthetics and values, etc.

I argue that artists rap about their spatialized, collective style in order to distinguish themselves from rappers hailing from other regions and places, locales with their own corresponding stylistic norms. In doing so, popular Houston rappers engage in a type of boundary constuction and policing through which a durable framework is established for communicating a hegemonic sense of indigeneity and authenticity in local hip hop. In this section I present a grounded analysis of boundary construction and maintenance in the music of established Houston artists with an eye to identifying and examining tractable rhetorical strategies, which in part comprise the durable framework artists call upon to take up a hood or G subject position, establishing their indigeneity and authenticity.

Of particular interest here are frequently-used rhetorical strategies, such as those listed above, which function in the service of portraying what Houston hip hop sounds and looks like. It is through an examination of such strategies that we may gain insights into the processes of conventionalization at work in the discourse of established local rappers, processes which facilitate the construction and maintenance of stylistic norms. Though the consequences may be unintentional, established local artists effectively configure a cultural center and its margins through these strategies by playing up what it means – in social-semiotic terms – to be a rapper from Houston. Center and margin emerge as a consequence of the essentializing discourse of popular artists, discourse which directly and indirectly links linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic practices with a

characterological figure (i.e. the G figure), portrayed as unequivocally local, distinctive, and representative of Houston hip hop.

Moreover, by examining tractable rhetorical strategies employed by artists to collectively identify with one way of "doing Houston," we expose the place of these strategies in the durable repertoire of signifying practices associated with Houston hip hop's cultural center. In other words, in addition to demonstrating what role particular rhetorical strategies play in conventionalizing stylistic norms, by identifying and examining these strategies we throw light on one dimension of a hegemonic local style. This dimension comprises recurrent rhetorical tactics deployed to position artists in line with popular discourses of indigeneity and authenticity, discourses which link social-semiotic practices with a particular, lived experience of place. Thus, we begin to pry open the inner-workings of Houston hip hop style, uncovering the relationships between different modalities of stylistic work, including the relationship between rhetorical strategies and phonetic variation, a relation explored in detail later in Chapter 7. Before examining this relationship, I turn first to a description of the approach taken to the rhetorical conventionalization of stylistic norms in Houston rap music.

4.2.2 The Approach: Methods and Data

Until this point I have used the term "rhetorical strategy" without delimiting its scope of use. In the context of this study, I talk of rhetorical strategies in referring to conventionalized discursive tactics – involving language specifically – through which social actors achieve some type of interpersonal goal. In our case, such goals include collectively identifying with other social actors vis-à-vis some orientation or position,

including a pro-hood, pro-Houston orientation. From a quantitative perspective regarding the methods used here, defining rhetorical strategy thus without further qualification opens the door to a panoply of potential instances of rhetorical maneuvering. Given the specific aims of this project, such ambiguity compels us to narrow the scope of rhetorical strategies employed by Houston hip hop artists to those most relevant to constructing and policing the social-semiotic boundaries of a local hip hop subjectivity. Moreover, as I draw on established quantitative sociolinguistic methods to examine phonetic variation among the artists in Chapter 7, it would prove advantageous to choose operationalizable rhetorical strategies, such that established criteria enable the consistent identification of the rhetorical strategies under study and their potential covariation with phonetic variation.

Nevertheless, choosing relevant rhetorical strategies which also lend themselves to being operationalized proves no easy feat. For example, masculine posturing through a variety of stylistic means is central to evoking the "G figure" subject position in popular hip hop, yet pinnning down what qualifies as masculine posturing discursively proves difficult, as there is no one-to-one correspondence between the deployment of particular elements of linguistic material and masculine posturing. In other words, there may exist cases which prove difficult or impossible to definitively categorize. This difficulty arises because the means available to artists for achieving the rhetorical effect in question are manifold, no doubt the rule and not exception.

It thus behooves us to examine other possible angles, particularly as the methods used in this dissertation are designed to throw light on the covariation of rhetorical strategies and phonetic variation in the asymmetical construction of hip hop personae. To

overcome this difficulty, that is, to make the rhetorical strategies under investigation more tractable, I have elected to examine relevant strategies which center around cultural, pragmatic domains, linked to particular lexical items. By taking this methodological angle, we position ourselves to identify instances of specific rhetorical strategies, quantify them, and compare their use across performances of the artists examined in the project.

The semantico-pragmatic domains I have chosen primarily consist in place and one's relation to place, including relations to place communicated through spatialized social practices. This domain proves fruitful to explore for several reasons. Since one foci of the dissertation is to understand how popular artists construct a mediating framework for establishing and communicating a sense of place, we are compelled to examine how these artists talk about place and their relation to place through hip hop song lyrics. The approach I take to examining how artists position themselves socio-spatially is two-fold. First, as mentioned above, artists often articulate a particular experience of place by portraying themselves as engaged in spatialized social practices. Such practices span a range of semiotic modalities, including the sartorial, kinesic, and linguistic. Importantly, artists refer to these social practices by using specific lexical items in their lyrics, as we have already seen in several excerpts above. These practices not only anchor artist to place, then, they also provide us with a tractable way to examine how artists relate to and construct a lived experience of place through reference to social practices. As each of these practices must be referred to in the lyrics in order to carry their rhetorical force, we may look for specific lexical items denoting such practices.

Again, we encounter the problem of delimitation, as any social practice may be referred to in the lyrics of popular artists. However, we may easily narrow the range of social practices examined by focusing on those most clearly characteristic and definitive of popular local style. To this end, I take cues not only from second-hand accounts of Houston's hip hop scene, such as Sarig's (2007) and Sonzala's (2006) popular works, but also from ethnographic field notes and interviews, from the mouths of established artists such as Mike Jones and rising stars such as Fat Tony.[35] Recall for example the quote from Mike Jones, in which the artist lists several types of social practices central to the stylistic articulation of a localized subjectivity, practices which include (1) drug culture, (2) car culture, and (3) fashion. As other writers (Sarig 2007, Sonzala 20056) and artists have noted, Houston has come to be known as the "city of syrup," the land of "grippin' grain," and the home of "iced-out grillz." Each of these social practices, respectively representative of (1)-(3) above, are referred to using specific lexical items: "syrup," "grain," and "grillz". We thus have one method[36] for making more tractable the communication of a sense of place, or what I will refer to as the rhetorical strategy of "emplacement" by means of the indexicalities of social practices. This method consists in listening to song lyrics and searching for lexical items which refer to social practices inextricably tied to the articulation of indigeneity in the music of established local artists.

Second regarding the approach to place, the methods adopteds here also include examining how artists explictly emplace themselves, "representing" the region, the state, the city, and so on, through their lyrics. Here the targets of our analysis are even more easily identifable, as they comprise places and place names, such as Houston, Texas, the

[35] See for example previous exceprts and probably stuff to come in later chapters.
[36] In Chapter Five I extend this approach to the music of thirteen Houston artists in order to determine to what extent they make differential use social practices. More on this methodology in Chapter 5.

Southside, or King's Flea Market.[37] Thus, as in the case of spatialized social practices, opertionalizing emplacement as a rhetorical strategy proves tractable through searching through song lyrics for lexical items referring to places. It is through these methods that we may operationalize[38] and identify the rhetorical strategy of emplacement in hip hop music.

Important here regarding emplacement through social practice is the function such a rhetorical move performs to (further) spatialize these practices, ultimately facilitating the construction and policing of social-semiotic boundaries. It is in this way that such a subtype of emplacement doubles in the service of conventionalizing stylistic norms vis-à-vis a hegemonic perspective of nativeness. That is, talk about style – or metastylistic discourse – not only links artist to place and communicates a particular experience of that place, but also it serves as a potent discursive tactic for establishing and maintaining cultural boundaries. It is in these ways that metastylistic discourse achieves multiple rhetorical ends, including not only emplacement, but also boundary construction and maintenance. As these processes of stylistic conventionalization and ideologization are at the heart of the analyses presented here and in following chapters, I take aim at metastylistic discourse in order to shed light on how established artists position certain stylistic practices as central among the repertoire of signifying acts utilized in establishing one's indigeneity in popular Houston rap music.

Thus, in what follows I approach the rhetorical strategies of emplacent and cultural boundary construction by examining the semantico-pragmatic domains of place and stylistic practice, quantifying instances of these strategies by searching for lexical

[37] A popular local establishment frequently referred to in popular Houston hip hop.
[38] Other ways may prove equally as fruitful, but those chosen here suit our purposes well, as further analysis reveals.

items linked to these domains, such as place names and words which denote the stylistic practices in question. It is in this way that we may more tractably identify and quantify instances of the two rhetorical strategies under study. A question arises here regarding the exclusivity of strategies in achieving more than one rhetorical end. For example, as we have already seen, artists may utilize metastylistc discourse for purposes of emplacement. However, such discourse also facilitates boundary construction and maintenenace vis-à-vis a stylistic repertoire.

Therefore, the use of metastylistic discourse toward the end of emplacing oneself also contributes to the sedimentation of stylistic norms. It is in this way that utilizing one rhetorical strategy – here, emplacement – may also function in the service of boundary construction, another rhetorical strategy of interest to the present study. What we have then is a case in which there is no clear one-to-one mapping between rhetorical strategy and rhetorical end achieved. From a methodological perspective, however, this does not diminish our ability to identify instances of the rhetorical strategies under consideration in the interest of quantifying them. What we must bear in mind when identifying and quantifying these strategies is their potential to achieve more than one rhetorical end. Thus, as metastylistic discourse potentially achieves the rhetorical goals of emplacement and boundary construction, reference to spatialized social practices may be counted as instances of both rhetorical strategies.

Such is also the case with the third rhetorical strategy under investigation, namely, self-categorization. The semantico-pragmatic domain associated with this strategy includes "types of people" based on one's relation to others along some social dimension, including the spatial. Thus, examples of emplacement such as "I represent the Southside"

function not only to emplace the utterer, but also to align her with other people sharing this relation to place. Therefore, as was the case of emplacement through metastylistic discourse, explicit forms of emplacement also function in the service of categorizing the speaker/artist in spatial terms, as a Southsider for instance. Again then, we observe the non-exclusivity of emplacement as rhetorical strategy – emplacing oneself may also function to construct boundaries or self-categorize the artist. This multifunctionality compels us to consider instances of emplacement through metastylistic discourse and explicit emplacement as instances of boundary construction and self-categorization, respectively.

Of course, emplacement is not the only tactic available to artists to self-categorize through their lyrics. MCs often draw on shared knowledge regarding extant subject positions – such as "G,"[39]thug, gangster, "hood nigga," etc. – to self-categorize, positioning themselves in relation to others who have taken up these subject positions. Important from a methodological standpoint here is the way we identify instances of self-categorization which do not also function in the service of emplacment. Doing so involves examining song lyrics for cases in which artists draw on a limited repertoire of labels and qualifiers, such as 'thug' and 'hood,' which function to categorize the artist. Thus, as in the previous cases, operationalizing self-categorization involves searching for specific lexical items utilized to achieve the rhetorical end in question.

Used in tandem, each of the rhetorical strategies mentioned so far – emplacement, boundary construction/maintenance, and self-categorization – are indespensible for linking stylistic practices with a rhetoric of indigeneity which portrays certain subject positions, such as 'thug,' 'hustler,' and 'player,' as uniquivocally representative of

[39] Short for gangster; elaborated on more later.

Houston rap music. Moreover, since these three rhetorical strategies involve the use of lexical items linked to specific semantico-pragmatic domains, we are able to opterationalize the deployment of such strategies in the lyrics of hip hop artists. This tractability proves central to establishing quantitative patterns of covariation in the use of the rhetorical strategies in question and phonetic variants, another modality of stylistic variation.

Central here is the role that the three rhetorical strategies under study play in constructing a discourse of nativeness which promotes and sustains the primacy of the popular style associated with established local hip hop artists (such as Mike Jones, Slim Thug, and Lil Keke). Discursive acts of emplacement bring place and indigeneity to the fore, and stylistic boundary construction – as well as self-categorization – give semiotic shape to indigeneity by linking personae, practice, and place. This connection involves acts of boundary construction and maintenance, achieved primarily through metastylistic discourse, which essentialize nativeness by portraying particular stylistic acts and subject positions as unquestionably local – representative and evokative of lived experience in Houston's hoods. It is in these ways that the three rhetorical strategies described above – emplacement, boundary construction, and self-categorization – prove essential to conventionalizing stylistic norms vis-à-vis indigeneity in the context of Houston hip hop. As I shall argue, these three rhetorical strategies themselves function as stylistic practices, each ultimately put to use in the service of semiotic boundary construction.

In this section, I examine how established artists employ the three rhetorical strategies discussed above to circumscribe the social and semiotic boundaries of a local hip hop subjectivity. Specifically, I draw on the methods described above to identify

instances of these rhetorical strategies in two verses from a song ("They Don't Know" by Paul Wall) which, during the second-coming of Houston rap music in the mid 2000's, played a pivotal role in representing Houston both to a local and extra-local audience. By combining a qualitative analysis of the visual language in the music video for "They Don't Know" with an analysis of rhetorical positioning based on the methods established above, we begin to throw light on the semiotic processes at work in conventionalizing a hegemonic style and rhetoric of place which mediate future performances by Houston rappers.

As mentioned above, the data to be analyzed comprise one verse from the music video for the song "They Don't Know" by local artist Paul Wall. I chose this song to illustrate how artists engage in discursive boundary construction based on the timing of the song's release and its overall self-reflexivity. Specifically, the song itself – titled "They Don't Know" – focuses lyrically on what people hailing from outside of Houston may not know about what it means to be a local artist in stylistic terms. In other words, the song itself functions to construct publicly-available insider knowledge of local stylistic norms. Importantly, "They Don't Know" provides us with an example of a widely-circulated (even at the international level) text which – at the macro-level – functions to promote essentializing images of indigeneity. Thus, by examining the song in question, we gain a deeper understanding of the macro-level forces at work in the conventionalization of a spatialized style and local subjectivity.

The text I examine exhibits a rich semiotic texture, drawing on visual language in addition to the lyrics of the song to construct an image of what Houston hip hop sounds and looks like. Given the textured nature of the data, in addition to its brief duration as a

stretch of discourse, I approach the analysis qualitatively, first describing how the visual language of the video links a paritcular experience of place with a rhetoric of nativeness. Second, I identify and discuss instances of the three rhetorical strategies described above, examining the relationship between the video's visual language and the rhetorical posturing of the artist. Through identifying and describing the rhetorical strategies under study, I discuss the practical dimensions of operationalizing and quantifying the deployment of these strategies in an effort to lay the methodological foundation for the quantitative analysis of rhetorical strategies presented in Chapter Five.

4.2.3 Analyzing the Video and Lyrics

I begin this section with a discussion of the visual language used by director Dr. Teeth in the video for Paul Wall's "They Don't Know" to frame a particular experience of the local as distinctive and representative[40]. The video begins with a mural in the shape of Texas positioned over the Texas flag. The shape of Texas itself has the word "Texas" scrawled upon it. So here we have three signs evokative of place, the word, the flag, and an iconic representation of the state, all at work. Moreover, it is worth noting that these signs are rendered through the medium of graffitti, evident from the paint drips on the concrete. This representational medium itself indexes its sociospatial environment, the hood. The introduction to the video also features several shots of the Houston skyline, which meronymically stands for the whole of Houston, as well as communicating an urban, city-dimension of place. This urban imagery is juxtaposed with footage of people riding horses in the streets, indexing the rural roots of several Houston hoods, and

[40] At the time I'm writing this, you can find the video on youtube.com.

distinguishing Houston as a decicdedly Southern urban center, in contrast with urban hubs such as Los Angeles and New York.

In addition to this overt spatial imagery, the director also focuses on elements of material culture associated with local social practices in order to communicate an experience of place. For example, we see a close-up shot of Paul Wall's platinum medallion, forged in the shape of a plastic "party cup," the vessel of choice for another spatialized social practice, "sippin' drank." Here we see the rich semiotic texturing of a spatialized style, with Paul Wall wearing iconic jewelry evokative of a social practice (drank sippin') itself tied to place through a rhetoric of indigeneity and distinctiveness.

Regarding the significance of other social practices to communicating a sense of place, the director vividly highlights the centrality of car culture, presenting colorful images of custom paint jobs and neon car lighting in a video otherwise shot entirely in black and white. Moreover, the social practice of swangin' in one's car is visually connected to its concrete setting, the streets of Black, working-class neighborhoods in Houston. It is in part through this visual juxtaposition of place and practices that the director underscores the centrality of such practices to a sense of place and place identitiy. Specifically, by choosing to depict visually a limited range of social practices, the director plays a part in the work of representation, essentializing the semiotic repertoire communicative of a Houston nativeness.

Furthermore, concerning the nature of nativeness in Houston hip hop, we observe the role the director plays in circumscribing this social-spatial relation by selecting a mostly-Black, urban, working-class neighborhood as the setting for Paul Wall's verse. The older cars, grown over sidewalks, and aging row houses communicate an experience

of economic depression, as does other imagery in the video. For example, at the end of Paul Wall's verse, the director shows another mural, this one a depiction of the "Lone Star Card" painted on the cinderblock wall of a corner store. This mural is of particular interest as it simultaneously communicates information about place and class, because the government program with which it is associated, a program which helps needy families purchase food, uses a well-known symbol for Texas, the lone star.

Thus, we see that, through a cursory examination of setting and spatialized imagery in the video under study, we may arrive at a better understanding of how indigeneity is framed in the music of popular local MCs through the visual language of the hip hop video. In a verse in which the lyrics aim to present a view – albeit limited – of Houston hip hop culture, we observe how the director complements this rhetoric of distinctive nativeness with essentializing images of indigeneity, images communicative of experience in Black, working-class neighborhoods. Furthermore, we see in the video how the director gives shape to this experience by focusing on specific stylistic practices and the social icons – i.e. established local hip hop artists – whose recurrent deployment of and reflection on these practices reflexively brings them to the fore in constructing a discourse of nativeness.

It is this discourse – in combination with the visual language of the video – which puts specific social types and practices at the cultural center of Houston hip hop. Importantly, the practices rapped about and depicted in the video are classed, associated with the street hustler or "playa" figure of local hip hop. Thus, we observe that director and artist collaborate to promote a narrow, racialized, classed vision of indigeneity in Houston hip hop which, in effect, portrays reified subject positions such as the hustler,

playa, or "G" as unequivocally local. To gain deeper insights into how these processes of essentialization unfold rhetorically, I now turn to a discussion of the lyrics from Paul Wall's verse on "They Don't Know."

As noted earlier, I have chosen this verse to examine because it clearly illustrates the use artists make of rhetorical strategies such as emplacement, self-categorization, and boundary-construction in presenting a distinctive image of the local to a broad audience. The title of the song, "They Don't Know," also serves as a refrain[41] in almost every couplet of the verse (and the whole of the song), positioning the artist as local insider, possessor of local knowledge unknown to those who don't "talk the talk" and "walk the walk" in Houston's hoods. And what it means to talk and walk like a Houston rapper is thrown into sharp relief in the lyrics of Paul Wall's verse, cited at length below.

In order to highlight how the artist makes use of the three rhetorical strategies discussed in §4.3.1, as well as to illustrate how the realization of one rhetorical strategy may achieve other rhetorical ends, I have elected to signal the deployment of one or more strategies simply through the commonly-used typographic conventions of underlining, italicizing, and bolding. These conventions serve us well as more than one may be applied to elements of linguistic material (i.e. they may be **bold**, *italicized,* and underlined). To code the data, I focus only on the linguistic material (e.g. words and phrases) which explicitly achieves the rhetorical strategy in question.

The scheme for coding the verse is as follows. First, instances of boundary construction, achieved here through metastylistic discourse, are coded in bold. Second, instances of emplacement realized explicitly or through metastylistic discourse, are coded in italics. Third, examples of self-categorization (i.e. declarations of what and who we

[41] The pronoun is changed though to "you," as in "you don't know."

are), are underlined. Below the excerpt, I present a qualitative perspective on the verse, in addition to considering methodological issues regarding operationizing the rhetorical strategies identified in the data.

1 What you know about ***swangaz and vogues***

2 What you know bout' ***purple drank***

3 What you know bout' ***poppin' trunk, neon lights, candy paint***

4 What you know about ***white shirts, starched down jeans with a razor crease***

5 ***Platinum and gold on top our teeth, big ol' chains with a iced out piece***

6 You don't know bout' Michael Watts

7 You don't know about DJ Screw

8 What you know about "***Man, hold up***!" "***I done came down***" and "***What it do***"?

9 You don't know about P.A.T

10 What you know bout' FREE PIMP C

11 What you know bout' the Swishahouse man

12 What you know bout' the S.U.C

13 We keep it playa, ain't no fake

14 When we holdin' plex whenever haters hate

15 We ***listen to music screwed and chopped***

16 *Down here in this Lone Star state*

17 Outta towners be comin' around

18 Runnin' they mouth and talkin' down

19 but you don't know nuthin' bout *my town*

20 either hold it down or move around

In the verse, Paul Wall repeatedly uses two structures, an interrogative and a negative declarative, to question or deny local knowledge on the part of an imagined outsider/other. This structural repetition functions in the service of establishing epistemic authority, where the artist positions himself to represent local hip hop culture as an insider. The questions thus serve to display Paul Wall's insider knowledge of local hip hop, while affording him an opportunity to say something about what it means to participate in Houston hip hop culture. In other words, by questioning or denying possession of local knowledge in the verse, Paul contributes to an ongoing, on-air dialogue concerning what it means – specifically in stylistic terms – to be a rapper from Houston. It is in this way that metastylistic discourse qua boundary construction works at the macro-level, at the level of global hip hop circulation, toward conventionalizing the relations among practice, personae, and place. That is, by reflecting on what makes Houston unique and distinctive while emphasizing his local knowledge of hip hop culture, Paul Wall plays his part in further sedimenting the social-semiotic boundaries of a local hip hop subjectivity.

Regarding the areas of knowledge about which Paul Wall raps, stylistic practices figure centrally, as is reflected by the range of linguistic material bolded in the passage. Specifically, we observe at least five domains of social practices on which the artist reflects in the verse: (i) car culture, (ii) drug culture, (iii) fashion, (iv) music production/consumption, and (v) language. The verse opens in line (1) with a reference

to car culture, here the practice of putting "swangaz" (=rims) on Vogue brand tires. Paul Wall returns to car culture in line (3), citing the practices of opening one's trunk to reveal neon interior lighting, as well as the practice of applying a custom paint job to the exterior of one's car. The artist also touches on the place of drug culture in the repertoire of social practices tied to a sense of indigeneity, referencing the consumption of "purple drank," the iconic drug of choice for many Houston rappers and fans alike.

In addition to car and drug culture, Paul Wall cites the importance of fashion, the sartorial dimension of local style. For example, in line (4) the artist references the practices of wearing over-sized white shirts with jeans that have been heavily starched to produce a hard crease. Moreover, in the following line (5), Paul Wall lists two jewerly-related practices tightly linked with local style, wearing grillz ("Platinum and gold on top our teeth") and gold or platinum chains with oversized, diamond-encrusted medallions. Important to note here is the indexical potentials these practices hold vis-à-vis the social actors who engage in them. By and large, the social practices related to car culture, drug culture, and fashion are classed, connected explicitly and juxtapositionally with the street hustler figures who not only reproduce these social practices, but who play a role in portraying them as distinctively local. It is in this way that established artists such as Paul Wall play a role at the macro-level not only in connecting social practices to a sense of nativeness, but also in portraying the street hustler figure who engages in these practices as unequivocally local.

Regarding this process of conventionalizing links between practice, personae, and place, we catch a glimpse in this verse of an artist reflecting on linguistic practices viewed as distinctively local. Specifically, in line (8), Paul Wall metalinguistically calls

attention to three phrases in local circulation: "Man, hold up!", "I done came down," and "What it do?", the second of the three containing the important phoentic variable /aw/. Important to note here is the awareness revealed in the verse both of the interconnectedness of these linguistic practices and other spatialized social practices, as well as the connection between practices and the types of social actors who employ them (e.g. the street hustler or G). Thus, we gain insignt into what folk linguistic models artists have regarding the indexical force exercised by the deployment of certain linguistic practices, including the three enumerated in the verse. Specifically, we observe how artists directly and indirectly link language use qua practice – in this case, the use of semiotically-textured[42] phrases – with a particular experience of place, here the experience of the street huslter or G.

Among the other social practices presented as distinctively local, Paul Wall also cites the centrality of producing and listening to so-called screwed-and-chopped music to local hip hop culture. In lines (11-12), for instance, the artist utilizes an interrogative to underscore insider knowledge of the DJs (DJ Screw and Michael Watts) responsible for popularizing the screwed-and-chopped style. Furthermore, in lines (15-16), Paul Wall appears to speak for all of Texas in proclaiming that "We ***listen to music screwed and chopped*** / Down *here in this Lone Star state*."

Here we see the overlap of boundary construction and emplacement most clearly. As the coding conventions used in the verse illustrate, instances of metastylistic discourse are bolded to signify boundary construction, while also italicized to indicate their potential to communicate a particular experience of place. In other words, while metastylistic discourse (primarily) functions to establish and maintain social-semiotic

[42] In the nesting doll sense already discussed; e.g. "down" is pronounced [da:n]

boundaries, it also indirectly emplaces social actors by virtue of the firmly-established relation between certain practice and the experience of place they evoke. That is, by claiming to "sip purple drank," artists emplace themselves by citing a social practice emblematic of a "street," hood experience of Houston. Such practices include the social domains of fashion, car culture, drug culture, and music culture. In this dissertation I focus on these four domains, specifically on practices in these domains tied to dominant articulations of indigeneity in popular rap music.

Returning to the overlap of boundary construction and emplacement, we see that metastylistic discourse exhibits a multifunctionality, positioning certain social practices as central to local style, while simultaneously holding the potential to communicate a sense or experience of place. It is for these reasons that I have elected to categorize metastylistic discourse as fulfilling both rhetorical ends of boundary construction and emplacement, as reflected by the bolding and italicization, respectively. In addition to metastylistic discourse, artists also often explicitly emplace themselves, as we see in line (16), where Paul Wall spatially contextualizes the practice of listening to music "***screwed and chopped***...*Down here in this Lone Star state*." Here, the artist overtly establishes his indigeneity by lyrically situating himself as part of the imagined community of Texas hip hoppers.

Interestingly, one could also analyze this positioning as a type of self-categorization, as it indeed seems to be. However, in this dissertation I focus on instances of self-categorization in which the artist takes up a well-known subject position in dominant local hip hop discourse, such as the "playa," "G," "gangsta," "thug," and so on. I also focus on ways-of-being communicated through zero-derivation of place names to

produce modifiers which pick out certain social types, for example, the use of "street" or "gutter" as modifiers which function to align the artist with other subculturalists who identify with a street or gutter experience of Houston.

I focus on these types of self-categorization to gauge to what extent artists orient to the regulatory discourse of dominant local rap music by taking up the subject positions most closely aligned with popular Houston hip hop style, such as the G or playa. In doing so, we are able in later chapters to examine correlations between taking up such subject positions through discourse and utilizing other stylistic practices, such as phonetic variation, to portray a more – or less – hood self-image. In other words, taking the music of artists such as Paul Wall, as a point of departure, we may identify various lexical items and phrases used to denote classed, spatialized subject positions, such as "playa" in line 13 of the verse cited above, which artists tightly weave together with social practices (e.g. wearing "***starched down jeans with a razor crease***") and references to actual places (such as Houston, the South, the Lone Star state, etc.) to make and remake a repertoire of stylistic practices connected to a specific experience of place (a hood or street experience, e.g.).

4.2.4 (Methodological) Reflections on the Analysis

We thus arrive at a set of methods for investigating how artists link a street experience of place with the social practices constitutive of this experience. Moreover, we position ourselves to determine to what extent particular artists portray themselves as the iconic social types most strongly associated not only with a rhetoric of indigeneity, but also with a discourse of realness or authenticity. For example, in line 13 of the verse,

Paul wall says "We keep it playa, ain't no fake," juxtaposing the act of self-categorization with a declaration of realness ("ain't no fake"). Importantly, we make tractable three recurrent rhetorical strategies by which popular artists establish and maintain a hegemonic sense of indigeneity, one which artist portray as *the* way to "do Houston" in local hip hop.

As the analysis reveals, identifying instances of particular rhetorical strategies proves challenging but not impossible, as I have focused on socio-pragmatic domains linked with specific lexical items and recurrent phrases. Nevertheless, though identifying the deployment of the rhetorical strategies under question becomes more clear-cut by focusing on easily-identifiable lexical items, there exists no one-to-one mapping between the linguistic material exploited to achieve a rhetorical end and the actual end(s) achieved. One example discussed in the previous section involved the overlap between boundary construction and emplacement. As I suggested in the analysis, metastylistic discourse – the primary means by which artists achieve stylistic boundary construction – proves to be multifunctional in that salient social practices are inevitably tied to an experience of place, as these practices are in the least partially-constitutive of this experience. Thus, to capture this overlap in a coding scheme, I've chosen to categorize instances of metastylistic discourse as functioning both to emplace the artist and to circumscribe which stylistic practices "hang together" in communicating an experience of place.

In choosing to analyze the three rhetorical strategies described above, I have taken an angle on understanding stylistic socialization and mediation in popular hip hop which focuses first on those social actors positioned to deploy these strategies in songs widely-

circulated (inter)nationally. Thus, we take into consideration the place of social actors with access to means of circulation and distribution, record companies which (unwittingly) function as the engines of conventionalization by signing and promoting artists who embrace a street style and experience of place. Regarding the practices which get swept up in the work of representation, I have elected to examine rhetorical strategies which I hypothesize are not only themselves interconnected, but also tightly bound up with other signifying practices, including the actual social practices referred to in metastylistic discourse, as well as phonetic variation (itself often embedded in locally-meaningful cultural terms for social practices).

As I will argue, decontextualizing and recontextualizing these interconnected practices across occasions of performance establishes a mediating framework or regulatory discourse which not only provides symbolic resources for communicating a particular (street) experience of place, but also one which rules in such resources as *the* way to do local in Houston hip hop. Thus, by ascertaining the presence or absence of the three rhetorical strategies under study, we gain insights into the extent to which different artists portray themselves as street. Moreover, we may explore the possibility for alternative indigeneities by examining whether artists explicitly emplace themselves, but make less (if any) use of the other two rhetorical strategies of boundary-construction and self-categorization. Such a scenario would suggest an attempt at establishing or advocating for a lived relation to place which is in some ways distinct from or even at odds with the dominant style in Houston rap music.

Returning to the social position in which artists such as Paul Wall find themselves, it is important to note that the rhetorical postitioning these artists engage in

exercises exceptional force in solidifying a sense of place and rootedness in the rhetoric of Houston hip hop, particularly owing to the limelight enjoyed by these artists at the top of the institutional hip hop hierarchy locally. That is to say, in analyzing what social icons such as Paul Wall, Slim Thug, or Lil Keke do rhetorically to carve out a distinct place for themselves and their music, we confront one dimension of the macro-level forces of signification and ideologization which function to connect social type and style to a street or hood sense of place, a sense of place portrayed as distinctively representative of Houston hip hop. It is in this way that we begin to pull back the veil, revealing the macro-level discursive forces at work in both conventionalizing a local style and socializing subculturalists to orient to this regulatory framework, this regime of representation, in crafting their own spatialized identities.

In the next section, I present a brief account of my fieldwork at a local public radio station, a site where macro-level forces of circulation and conventionalization are at work as the music of Houston rappers is transmitted locally through terrain-based radio, and (inter)nationally, through internet radio. Because the station also functions as a site for networking and socializing for local MCs, DJs, producers, publishers, and so on, Damage Control also proves a rich site for examining the interplay between macro-level norming and the (re)production of norms at the local level of interaction. That is, by participating in conversations at the station and interviewing station regulars, we may uncover how norms are reproduced "on the ground," moment-by-moment, through conversational interaction, freestyle cyphers, and the social structuring of space.

4.3 Damage Control: Styling Locally (and Globally) at "the Station"

In the Summer of 2003 I began visiting the local KPFT Pacifica chapter in Houston[43], Texas, housed in an older home located in the heart of Houston's Montrose district, an area known more for gay pride and art festivals than ground-breaking hip hop broadcasts. Nevertheless, in and outside of this unassuming white house, hip hop artists, promoters, publicists, DJs, producers, documentarians and others gathered to network, promote their art, find talent, and more. My becoming part of this crowd was a happy accident, as my college friend Nibu had a radio show at the station and used this as an excuse to pick up his mail for the show, late at night on Wedensdays when Damage Control aired. It was through visiting the station with Nibu each week that I became familiar with the regulars who made Damage Control happen. Before continuing to a perspective on the social scene, I would like first to locate myself socially among my peers at the station and say a few words regarding why I chose Damage Control as my primary site for exploring norming and socialization vis-à-vis style in Houston hip hop.

4.3.1 Locating the Researcher

At the time I began my research at the station, I was twenty-four years old and had just began study at a Linguistics PhD program at Rice University in Houston, Texas. I am a white male, born in Houston and raised an hour north of the city. Regarding my upbringing, suffice it to say it was relatively middle-class and decidedly rural. My interest in studying Houston hip hop stemmed from a lifelong love for local rap, having listened to hip hop – both local and nonlocal – since my earliest recollections. As a

[43] Hereafter referred to as Damgage Control or simply "the station."

teenager I purchased any rap music from Houston that I came across. This music eventually included DJ Screw and Michael Watts' mixtapes. However, once in high school and college, I became aware of another currrent, one might call a countercurrent, comprised of hip hop artists which openly focused on revitalizing, reorienting the artistic foci of hip hop, including exceptional lyrical skills, as well as social practices associated with the "golden era" of hip hop, including graffitti, breakdancing, and especially Djing or turntablism.

In the late '90s my friends and I spent weekends at a local club named The Wax Musem (or just "The Wax"), the club's name a pun foregrounding the role of the DJ "spinning wax" – a medium on the way out, so to speak – on the turntables. It was here that I became familiar with one of Houston's "undergrounds," what Wax Museum regulars simply referred to as "the underground." The focus at The Wax on reviving social practices associated with golden era hip hop, including three somewhat neglected elements of hip hop (DJing, breakdancing, and graffitti), stood in stark contrast with commercially-popular hip hop in Houston at the time, taking its cue from what was going on in the streets at the time that distinguished Houston from other hip hop scenes.

Later in 2003, while studying sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, I became intrigued by the qualities and functions[44] of symbolic differentiation between artists invoking an "old school" set of values and aesthetics in hip hop, on the one hand, and artists focused more on the "here-and-now" of hip hop as it unfolded in the streets of Houston. Indeed, before careful study was undertaken, I folded a piece of notebook paper lenghwise and began scribbiling down observations about these two disparate

[44] While we cannot escape precedents regarding the meanings this term, "function," I argue it sufficiently evokes the role a social practice plays in negotiating social relations.

sociocultural formations in an effort to begin chipping away at the how's and why's of systematic social-semiotic differentiation in Houston hip hop – broadly conceived. Several linguistic variables showed up in these two columns, including the monophthongization of /aw/ and lowering of /I/ pre-engma. The first of the variables stood out as the contexts for variation included a number of culturally-salient words and phrases, including a nickname for Houston, "H-Town," as well as numerous phrases such as "comin' down," "showin' out," and "puttin' it down." In each of these expressions, a phrasal verb containing the context for /aw/ variation provided what Coupland (2007) has termed "phono-opportunities," a chance for artists to stylize the production of the vowel in question. The second variable, /I/-lowering pre-engma, also stood out as the context for variation was found in culturally salient terms for local social practices such as "ridin' swangaz" and "sippin' drank."

Key here in my crude preliminary assessment of semiotic differentiation is the relationship between sociocultural practices on each side of my folded paper. At first, I found it straight-forward to lay out relationships between signifying practices this way, with underground artists producing diphthongal /aw/'s and unlowered /I/'s pre-engma – two cultural practices which seemed to "fit" with other social practices which culturally differentiated ways of doing hip hop in Houston from one another. It was this preliminary observation that there was more than one way to do hip hop in Houston that spurred my research: What subulcutral formations exist? Do they reify the formation through processes of labeling? How do artists and subculturalists orient to these discursive formations? To what extent does style play a role in differentiating different currents in Houston Hip Hop? What power imbalances exist among the artists and social formations?

How do place and indigeneity factor into the production of hip hop personae? How do artists that orient to different cultural currents establish, maintain, and police social-semiotic boundaries through their music?

It was to these questions that initially drew me to the radio station, although at first it was simply a chance to meet fellow hip hop fans and artists. As the project began to take shape, I noticed that a number of artists, producers, and promoters consistently came every Wednesday night to socialize on the stoop or back porch of the station, promoting their music by passing out CDs and occasionally doing interviews on the radio program. It became clear that spending time at the station offered a unique opportunity to get to know the people who made Damage Control *the* place to be to promote one's music. It also became obvious that not all artists (frequently) promoted their music at the station, which raised a question: Why didn't The Wax Museum crowd and those who inherited The Wax's direction in hip hop spend time at Damage Control networking and advancing their careers?

In the hopes of answering these questions, I began to visit the station weekly, making notes and eventually conducting ethnographic interviews with station regulars. All of this was made possible by Nibu, through his introducing me to regulars and station employees. These introductions led to friendships and set the stage for me to begin approaching the initial questions which guided my research. It was through hanging out on the stoop and the back porch, as well as inside the station studio, that I began to address and refine these questions. In the next section I discuss how I entered the social scene at Damage Control with the help of Nibu. Specifically, I focus on the process of meeting folks and participating in conversations with station regulars. It was through

these meetings and exchanges that I began to develop my own take on social order and power, as well as boundary construction and maintenance, produced through the give and take of participation among regulars and employees at the station.

4.3.2 Meeting Folks: Some Introductions[45]

As a radio show host and contributing writer for a local pop culture magazine *Hater*, Nibu played a key role not only in introducing me to people at Damage Control, but also in vouching for my credibility as a participant in local hip hop cultures. This vetting process wasn't overt; Nibu himself was already a respected journalist and purveyor of taste to many at the station and beyond. I thus indirectly benefited from his reputation and, in time, came to participate in the social structure[46] of the station.

This structure – or structurally-recurring patterns of cultural practices – was sustained by the MCs, DJs, producers, journalists, and others who spent their Wednesday nights at the station, networking, promoting, and socializing. Young Zeak (formerly Golden Child) was one of the first among these people with whom I became well-acquainted. A young student at a local university, Zeak was, at that time, a self-proclaimed third-generation Screwed Up Clique (SUC) artist gaining a foothold at Damage Control through networking and self-promotion.

I first met and interviewed Zeak in the Spring of 2004, at a time when popular Houston rappers were rising in the national hip hop market. For Zeak, as well as for some of the writers mentioned in §4.1.1, the growing popularlity of Houston hip hop was

[45] Though I interviewed other artists for the project, not all were station regulars. They will be discussed later in the chapter.
[46] By social structure I simply mean to capture the perduring relationships and roles of those people who regularly frequented Damage Control.

fueled by a homegrown trend in rap music set into motion by DJ Screw and his stable of artists, a group of locals who often receive credit for redefining the "Houston sound." As Zeak himself has noted, "you gotta be a trendsetter...Screwed Up Clique, we set the trends." Key here is the belief that the style and image of a hip hop scene is socially constructed and can change, and that this change can be effected from the bottom-up vis-à-vis the culture industries. This sentiment resonates in Zeak's claim that if you work hard to promote music which appeals to a local fanbase, you can in fact transform the scene, "just like Screw switched it up."[47]

By locating his music in relation to DJ Screw, Zeak socially positions himself in a number of ways. For instance, rappers associated with Screw portray themselves as in and of "the streets," where the street functions metonymically to communicate a particular experience of place. Specifically, "the streets" and "the 'hood" are discursively tied to the activity of "hustling," itself a nebulous concept in the music of hip hop. In the broadest sense, nearly everyone at Damage Control is "hustling," trying to realize their goals through social (inter)action. In a more narrow sense, to hustle in the streets or the 'hood involves selling drugs or engaging in other illlicit activities to financially realize one's goals. It is this sense of hustling that is explicitly tied to a notion of "the streets" in popular Houston rap music. Furthermore, it is the street-hustler figure who is presented as authentically in and of the streets.

This observation proves useful for understanding not only semiotic variation among Houston artists in general, but also more specifically for making sense of social organization at Damage Control. For instance, the station regulars I became friends with

[47] I.e. advanced a sound different from that for which Houston originally was known nationally, e.g. the music produced by Rap-A-Lot records.

and whose experiences help fill the pages of this dissertation evoke the street-hustler figure in different ways through their music, at times taking up this social position explicitly. A group with whom I became friends at the station, The Circle Gz, exemplify the reification of this charaterological figure through their group's name. A "G," short for "gangsta" (but not necessarily coextensive with this term), is the (street) hustler *par excellence*: "On the grind,"[48] credible in the streets, and in control (of himself[49] or whatever affairs in which he is involved).

In my time spent at the radio station, I became particularly close with two members of the Circle Gz, JB and A-Dub. JB, the college basketball player, and A-Dub, the quiet practical joker, passed many Wednesday nights at Damage Control with Nibu and me. Though they sometimes evoke the street-hustler figure in constructing their on-mic personae, I know JB and A-Dub as music hustlers, two rappers who fit the description of a G in all sense of the term sans selling drugs. In fact, I met JB and A-Dub one night when they were promoting a new mixtape, "Circle City Madness," at Damage Control. As I describe in following sections, the radio station has served as a forum or social crossroads at which a number of players in the local culture industries gather to advance their careers. For this reason, Damage Control has been more than a radio program for many MCs; it has given airtime to artists carrying on the DIY tradition of Screw, providing them with a much-needed opportunity not only to play their music for a wider audience, but also to talk about their music on-air with the host of Damage Control, Matt Sonzala.

[48] Another term for "hustling;" working hard.
[49] I use this pronoun to indicate the usage of "G" as limited primarily to the description of men.

It was for this reason that I crossed paths with another group promoting themselves at the radio station, On Dekk Entertainment, comprising a small stable of artists and mangager, Will. The night I became quanited with On Dekk, I met Will and two artists from this camp, Kritikal – one of the MCs who figures centrally in my research – and Solo, producer and rapper. Born in rural East Texas and raised in Houston, Kritikal stood out as a prominent solo artist representing On Dekk, promoting his mixtape on-air the night we met at the radio station. As I later came to know, Kritikal, Solo, and On Dekk Entertainment not only often collaborated with The Circle Gz musically, but also they were close friends and regulars at the radio station. In fact, during the course of my fieldwork, hardly a Wednesday passed without me seeing and talking with Kritikal, JB, and A-Dub. In the next section, I discuss not only the topics of our many conversations, but also how these interactions unfolded in and around the station. In particular, I examine how the socio-physical organization and surrounding environs of the station both provided opportunity and restricted access to artists seeking to promote themselves.

4.3.3 From the Stoop to the Booth: The Station, Space, and Self-Presentation

The hub of Houston's street-oriented, DIY hip hop is located in the heart of an area dubbed by locals as "The Montrose," a neighborhood known for its bohemian and gay haunts and hangouts. For aspiring hip hop artists, one block in the Montrose was a bastion of opportunity for promoting their music. In a quiet neighborhood tucked away from the main drags of Westheimer and Montrose, Damage Control has been located since 2001 in a house converted into a Pacifica Radio station. It was at this time that Matt

Sonzala, noted local music journalist and founder of the popular blog "HoustonSoReal," began hosting Damage Control. Regarding the origins of the show, Sonzala notes in an interview with the website *24hrgrind.com*

> Really it started as an idea to give independent artists from Houston and the south some real airtime. Some time to expose their music and talk about things outside the typical box of the typical rap interview. I feel like we've definitely achieved that.

What Sonzala may not have forseen is the role the radio station as a physical locale would play in providing a spot for local artists to gather and network, both inside and outside of the building. When I began frequenting Damage Control, I was surprised at the amount of people who came weekly to promote themselves and network, oftentimes crowding the various spaces in and around the station, in some cases even spilling out onto the streets and into people's cars. In his pursuit to provide independent artists a voice, Sonzala transformed a pedestrian public radio station into a hotbed of move-makers, a multi-faceted space where artists mutually-engaged in the endeavor of promoting themselves could do much more: Damage Control became a site where MCs and others regularly "hung out," utilizing the space to pass the time with friends and new acquaintances by talking about such topics as local sports rivalries, local rappers, the state of hip hop, and more.

These interactions not only took place in and around the station, but were subject in part to the physical layout and social control of space at Damage Control. Some of the areas inside the station, such as the booth and secondary studios, were closely monitored

by station volunteers, so access to these areas was institutionally restricted such that entrance to the booth or studios required the permission of Sonzala or one of the regular station DJs.

My first visit to the station did not bring me to either the booth or any secondary studios. Instead, like many others new to the station, my first point of social interaction was the lighted stoop at the front of KPFT. No special permission was needed to walk up and find your place in front of the station. My choice of words here conveys the reality of hanging out at Damage Control: Though not institutionally-sanctioned, small groups of regulars frequently utilized the stoop and front-facing parking lot as a space to gather and talk. Thus, the stoop was not a free and neutral space, but rather an emergently-structured area populated by regulars who could extend a warm welcome or make one feel out of place. Fortunately, through my association with Nibu, I came to know well the two hip hop groups mentioned above, The Circle Gz and On Dekk – groups who staked their place both outside and inside the station.

Of particular interest to the aims of my project are conversations and "cyphers[50]" which took place on or around the stoop, interactions that threw light on norms regarding what is expected of hip hop artists in and *of* the city. For example, conversations on the stoop sometimes took a metalinguistic turn. In one such case, the manager of a local group was talking about the name of a new mixtape (i.e. collection of songs continuously mixed) released by a DJ affiliated with Damage Control. The DJ in question, Gloss, is a young Latina who, at the time, had recently moved from the Southwest to be a DJ in the Houston hip hop scene. Earlier in the evening, Gloss handed her mixtape to the manager in question, who we shall call M. Before looking at the cover, M inquired as to the

[50]Circles of MCs taking turns rapping.

mixtape's name. While he looked at the case, Gloss replied "Southern Swing," which elicited a smile from her inquirer.

The event is worth recounting because of the way the word "swing" had been pronounced, in contrast with the way it was spelt on the mixtape's cover: "swang". In the context of popular Houston hip hop, lowering of /i/ pre-engma is normative, as reflected by the spelling of "swang" on the cover art. What was at issue this night was the mismatch between how Gloss presented herself on the mixtape through eye-dialect and how she presented herself through speech. The subtle discord related by M undermined Gloss' legitimacy, which had been called into question immediately prior to—and most likely prompting—M's narrative. This example of metapragmatic awareness illustrates the value of ethnographic methods to the present research: With no knowledge of partially-shared norms and assumptions, the force of this metalinguistic commentary would have been lost.

Conversations which explicitly touched on normative practices in Houston hip hop were more commonplace than I had initially expected. In fact, conversations and even rap battles on the stoop often centered around the expectations that audience and industry had regarding what a rapper (from Houston) should look and sound like. In many instances, station regulars (myself included) discussed limitations artists faced in terms of personal style and self presentation, limitations similar to those touched on in the Fat Tony quote earlier. Around 2004-2005, while some of Houston's artists were on the rise, gaining notariety for their distinctive, Screw-influenced style of music, other artists were finding the image cultivated by these rising stars too confining and unrealistic, particularly regarding the accumulation of wealth and status symbols.

These sentiments are echoed by artist Kritikal's song "Reppin' Texas," in which he openly attempts to balance his overt affiliation with the Houston scene while rejecting the centrality of grillz, S.L.A.B.s, and designer clothes to the semiotic make-up of a local artist. In the song's lyrics, Kritkal proclaims "Yeah I'm from Texas, but I don't have a grill..." From this couplet we gain some understanding regarding what expectations artists face in portraying themselves as rooted, local artists. Moreover, we see how hip hop music functions as a reflexive medium to question these expectations, potentially making room for a mulitplicitous indigeneity.

While the preceding example speaks to the role artists play in interrogating local norms, conversations and cyphers on the stoop often illustrate how more global norms are reproduced at the local level of interaction. The exchange between DJ Gloss and M serves as an example of this reproduction of norms, as does the following example from a telephone conversation. In this case, JB and I are talking about an upcoming DJ competition, when he :

Field Note: "Southside New Yorkians" (6-18-2007)

I was at the station with JB and he was talking about a DJ competition this Wed that he wants Nibu and me to go to. He brought up someone who had collaborated with K-Ruger from the South Side, and he said:

"He's one of those Southside New Yorkians,"

[I asked him what he meant, and he said:]

"you know, Houston Eastsiders,

people who always got on New York gear, and got that fabricated East coast accent:

1 *I know who shot pac SON...*
2 ...SON?... you from Acres Homes [Houston
3 neighborhood]!

In this excerpt we observe a familiar rhetorical strategy, constructed dialogue. As in the excerpt in the Introduction to the present work, this field note illustrates the use of constructed dialogue to reinforce partially-shared norms and assumptions. Here, JB voices a generic "Southside New Yorkian," a term he uses to characterize artists from the Southside of Houston who he judges to use stylistic practices associated with New York rap music. Central here are the rhetorical strategies JB uses to challenge the authenticity of hip hop subculturalists from Houston who wear "New York gear" and "got that fabricated East coast accent," people JB calls both "Southside New Yorkians" and "Houston Eastsiders."

These short excerpts show how one Houston artist negotiates expectations regarding the relationship between stylistic practices and a sense of place. The two impromptu labels JB uses to characterize a subjectivity, the "Southside New Yorkians," reify this position through labeling and make it available rhetorically for scrutiny later in the constructed dialogue. In this dialogue, an exchange transpires between a fictive "Houston Eastsider," in line 1, and (presumably) JB in lines 2-3. Key to this exchange is the use and pronunciation of the lexeme "son." Historically, in the speech of young, Black New York hip hoppers, "son" has been used in a way comparable to "man," "homey," or "potna" (i.e. partner) – as a generic term for another interactant. Important

here is the reach of this term in the linguistic practices outside of New York. As the excerpt makes clear, "son" is discursively available to subculturalists as far away as Houston, and its use carries social implications. In the field note, JB implicitly challenges the use of this provencialized term and its raised, fronted pronunciation. Specifically, he employs constructed dialogue to criticize the use of "son" by a Houston native, as something out of character for someone from the Southside.

Focusing on both the processes and products of the interaction described above, we observe how social actors such as JB play a role in shaping their interlocutors' beliefs regarding such notions as indigeneity and authenticity. Here, the crucial point is that ideology is reproduced both globally and locally, on the micro-level through everyday performance (Shuck 2004). In reflecting on beliefs or models we share, social actors such as JB play a role in producing some measure of consenus among their milieu regarding the semiotic make-up of spatialized subjectivitities. However partial or fragmented, such models influence future performances when (re)produced and reinforced by those with the "power to represent," that is, institutionally-supported artists. In such cases, recurrent ways of talking about localness, for instance, function as discursive precedents for framing notions such as indigeneity and authenticity.

These precedents may impose limitations of a very specific semiotic nature, revealed in metalinguistic comments about pronunciation variants and lexical variation. Artists and subculturalists address these limitations head-on, as we have already seen, in conversations between regulars and newcomers to the social scene at Damage Control. For example, while talking on the stoop with a close friend and local promoter – who we shall call T – I noted how the full force of the social history of discourse holds the

potential to shape stylistic choices and self-percpetion in a fluid social structure. I attempt to describe T's reflection on the structural effects of dominant currents in hip hop in the following field note excerpt:

Field Note: "Dreadlocks and Dickie shorts" (6-02-2006)

> T talked about what had been going on, and we caught up. We ended up talking about a time in his life when we "woke up," and "got conscious," [his words] when he was in college. What brought this on was my talking about if you want to see change in "the system," [=hip hop social structure] you have to make change, every day, at a local level. He was talking about doing just that, and how you gotta get people on board. He brought up Common [=hip hop artist from Chicago] wearin knit clothes, and how people were suspicsious at first, but then it caught on for awhile. T was saying that when he "woke up" he really wanted to wear some different looking clothes, said he was Andre from Outkast[51] wearing a turban! He even said some of his friends who hadn't woken up quite yet even got into wearin that sort of stuff, to be different. But for T it wasn't just about being different, it was about separating himself from the stylistic options that he associated with "being asleep." One interesting thing about the conversation was that he said it took him some time to conclude that you could still wear Dickie shorts[52] and be awake—you didn't have to rock a turban.

Here, what is interesting is how style enters conspicuously into a "self"-conscious discussion of ideology and transformation. T suggests that when your opinions change, and when you see yourself in a different role, one way to signal this tranformation is to express it stylistically, through your dress and hair, for instance. T then goes on to talk about reconciling this new "consciousness" and old ways-of-being, of dressing, and so

[51] A popular hip hop group from Atlanta, Georgia.
[52] Dickie shorts are clothing associated with a hood subjectivity, potentially indexical of "being asleep" in T's words.

on. When he says you can be "awake" and wear Dickie shorts, he is saying "This isn't an either/or decision: I can do both".

Again, this field note excerpt throws into relief the relationship between beliefs linking style with particular ways-of-being in the world. In the case of the conversation I had with T, we see a portion of "the problem" that Fat Tony describes earlier in this chapter, a problem concerning the politics of representation in Houston hip hop. Both T and Fat Tony suggest that an artist can pledge allegiance with a Houston neighborhood while departing from the stylistic norms of popular local rap music, though in Fat Tony's case, this departure comes with consequences.

Key to our current purposes is the role of the radio station as a physical locale providing an opportunity for hip hop subculturalists to negotiate the social landscape of popular hip hop through conversation. The exchange I had with T took place on the stoop of the radio station, in public, between social actors who regularly participate in the give and take of social life at Damage Control. Along with M's commentary regarding the pronunciation variant in "swang," as well as JB's description of "Southside New Yorkians," the conversation I had with T exemplifies the interplay between the global and the local, that is, how social actors exposed to similar macro-level social forces (including hip hop music and journalism) reflect on, reproduce, and challenge norms established and circulated through these global media on a more local scale – through conversation.

4.3.4 Summary

This local angle on the production and rejection of hip hop norms contrasts with the macro-level pespective taken in §4.2. There, I described the part played by popular Houston artists – in the case study, Paul Wall – in (re)producing and circulating ways of talking about notions such as authenticity and indigeneity. In the following section, I have described three exchanges which took place at the radio station, exchanges that reveal not simply static social facts, but dynamic, discursive processes which introduce globally-circulated perspectives and norms into the local setting of the radio program. Subculturalists such as JB and T negotiate norms with their interactants, reproducing and revising normativity through the dynamic unfolding of interaction.

We see this dynamism in the cases of both cultural transformation and semiotic boundary maintenance, exemplified in the three conversations discussed in §4.3.3. In each of these three cases, normativity and counter-normativity are socially produced through exchanges between interactants mutually-engaged in participation at Damage Control. As the three exchanges show, social actors do not treat stylistic norms regarding linguistic and sartorial practices as immutable and static, but rather as socially-constructed conventions produced at both the local and global level.

Moreover, as my description of the converstations with JB and T illustrate, social actors orient to widely-circulated stylistic precedents linking socially-available subjectivities with semiotic practices – such as regionalized speech variation and the classed practices of a "conscious," college-educated hip hop subculturalist. These precedents are discursively-available, both reproduced and challenged at the local level of interaction. In the next chapter, I examine one angle for evaluating the availability of

such precedents and their (dominant) indexical potentials. This angle involves exploring the nature of hip hop parody, a reflexive genre of rap music which artists employ to critique indirectly the same dominant, stylistic norms which gave shape to the three interactions described in §4.3.3. As I shall show, hip hop parody synthesizes local reflections on dominant currents in hip hop and circulates a counter-normative discourse on the more global level, leveling a critique aimed at popular artists who narrowly portray indigeneity and authenticity in the context of Houston rap music and cultural formations.

Chapter Five

Hip Hop Parody as Veiled Critique

5.1 Introduction

In §4.2 of the previous chapter, I discussed ways in which popular Houston artists play a role in promoting a narrow perspective of indigeneity and authenticity at the global level. Specifically, I outlined three rhetorical strategies that artists utilize – metastylistic discourse, emplacement, and self-categorization – to communicate a distinctive sense of rootedness. Regardless of their intentions, popular artists lay down a history of discourse centering around what it means to be a rapper or G from Houston (in the context of local hip hop). This discourse provides a semiotic framework for future performances, including entextualized stretches of speech which achive relational goals of the rhetorical strategies with which these texts are associated.

However, in addition to enabling future performances, prior discourse constrains self-presentation in yet-to-be-performed hip hop texts. The social history of discourse has norming effects, as established artists set intertextual precedents for communicating a distinctive sense of place. These precedents shape shared ideas concerning what counts as legitimate socially, semiotically, in popular local hip hop. It is in this way that the essentializing rhetoric of popular hip hop constrains future performances, politicizing indigeneity through rhetorical boundary construction. By cultivating a collective sense of spatialized distinctiveness, popular artists establish and maintain cultural boundaries, effectively configuring a social center and resulting margins.

In this chapter, I examine how artists marginalized by the essentializing rhetoric of popular hip hop interrogate dominant stylistic norms, social practices associated with the G subject position portrayed in Houston rap music as unequivocally local. As I show, artists who do not identify with the G figure – specifically artists critical of the G's naturalness – adopt stylistic practices associated with popular local hip hop to question the logic and desirability of this music and the self-proclaimed Gs who promote its stylistic distinctiveness. The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. In §4.2 I introduce the possibility of parody in hip hop music. In the following section, §4.3, I present one example of hip hop parody from a scene outside of Texas, in order to show that the problems faced by marginalized rappers in Houston are not entirely unique, but rather symptomatic of the commercialization of hip hop culture in the United States. The example comes from work on hip hop which takes a historical angle to examine the discursive production of authenticity in rap music. (Ogbar 2007)

In §4.4 I introduce what I and others consider the status quo in popular Houston rap music. To this end, I describe scenes and lyrics from the critically-acclaimed video for the track "Still Tippin'" by local artist Mike Jones. In this section, I discuss processes of (semiotic) norming which arise in part from essentializing rhetoric which aims to frame Houston as a scene distinct from other regional scenes competing in the national hip hop market. I present an analysis of Houston hip hop parody in §4.5, focusing on a track circulated on the internet by an artist using the oxymoronically alias "Lil' Big Yung." Concluding remarks follow in §4.6.

5.2 Hip Hop Parody

Inherently intertextual, parodies involve the use of semiotic practices indexically associated with the subject of parody, in some cases a particular person or socially-recognizable personae.[53] Parodists employ these indexically-linked semiotic practices in an exaggerated fashion, to ridicule indirectly the parodied subject. In the domain of hip hop cultural production, artists marginalized by institutionally-sanctioned systems of distribution use parody to interrogate the naturalness or desirability of prevailing norms, which tie semiotic practices to characterological qualities. These parodies involve recognizing norms shared in dissonance, norms regarding authenticity and indigeneity, essentializing discourses which render adherents to opposing norms deviant.

Though in this sense discursive formations such as authenticity constrain social action, it is through recognizing and interrogating the normativity of such discourses that social actors – in the case examined here a small population of MCs from Houston, Texas – exercise some measure of agency (Butler 2004, Carter 2007), portraying those who police dominant norms negatively, as less skillful, materialistic, and disingenuously sociopathic. Hip hop parodists achieve this social end by leveling a veiled critique at popular artists. To succeed in their critique, these MCs exploit prior texts (i.e. songs) by transposing strategies popular artists use in styling their personae. For example, in order to communicate a sense of rootedness in a particular neighborhood,[54] hip hop artists often employ what I term metastylistic discourse, that is, speech about style. By referring to contextually-bound stylistic practices such as "getting smoked out" and "jammin

[53] See Hall (2005) for kotis' challenge of hijra authentcity, or Holmes & Schnurr (2006:33) for subverting hegemonic notions of feminity

[54] What Rose (2008) and other scholars term "representing," a common word in hip hop parlance.

Screw"[55] in the 'hood with their friends, artists establish a connection to place indexically, evoking subterranean, characterological qualities associated with lived experiences of their neighborhoods.

These qualities are linked to a spatialized, classed, racialized, and gendered experience of place (hyper-local, working-class, Black, and male), fleshing out the "G" or street-hustler figure, a social relation reified through a number of partially-overlapping labels[56] and thus made intertextually available for future recontextualizations. This G figure self-affiliates and roots himself[57] in socio-geographic space. Take for instance the following passage from Houston artist Lil' Keke's song "It's Going Down:"

Lil Keke: "It's Going Down"

1 It's goin' down, yeah I'm talking to you,
2 H-Town, smoked out jammin' Screw,
3 Tell your crew it's '97, it ain't no refusin,'
4 We got 'em to the bottom now they all lovin' Houston.

Here, Lil' Keke explicitly connects place and practice, marrying the spatial with a lifestyle or "taste culture" (Thornton 1995) grounded in its concrete environs. Through frequent reference to social practices constitutive of a collective experience of place, popular artists play a key role in the sedimentation of stylistic norms. The result is a durable, intertextual framework for "doing local;" that is, evoking not simply a socio-geographic connection, but rather a socially-positioned, interest-laden experience of place

[55] A style named for its creator in which music is considerably slowed down, purportedly to complment the use of marijuana and "syrup," a codeine-laced beverage.
[56] (O)G (i.e. original gangsta), playa, hustla, gangsta, hood nigga, etc.
[57] I choose this pronoun as all the artists in my study happen to be men.

comprising stylistic practices, aesthetics, and values. Collectively, the norms connecting place with style and values function as a "regime of representation," (Hall 1997) linking social images with discourses of authenticity and indigeneity. Importantly, through the support of institutions such as record labels and corporate-owned radio stations, established artists find themselves uniquely positioned to circulate essentializing images of indigeneity, narrowly reducing the range of practices and experiences which "count" as authentically local in the field of hip hop cultural production locally.

Considering the multiplicity of lived experiences in Houston's predominantly Black neighborhoods, we can begin to appreciate the marginalized position that artists who do not identify with prevailing norms find themselves. Established rappers claim to "represent" (Rose 2008) not only their streets and neighborhoods, but also the whole of Houston and Texas. In other words, in the fourth-largest city in the U.S.,[58] a handful of popular rappers present to the world a relatively singularizing vision of what it means not only to claim affiliation with place as an artist, but also – more broadly – to take up the role of MC[59] in the cultural field of local hip hop (locally and beyond).

Responding to these norming processes, artists marginalized by the essentializing rhetoric of popular hip hop opt to resist or reframe through performance, creating parodic hip hop songs circulated virally on the internet. These songs trope on local norms which tether the MC subject position to the G or hustler figure, characterized by a do-it-yourself (DIY), sometimes criminal approach to achieving social goals, including the accumulation of wealth and material signifiers of success (such as a platinum "piece and chain," i.e. a necklace and. medallion).

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[58] At the time I write this.
[59] MC is used in the paper interchangeably with the terms rapper and (hip hop) artist.

Finding their values and aesthetics at odds with the G subjectivity and hustler lifestyle, hip hop parodists produce songs through which they temporarily adopt the voice and style associated with popular Houston rap music, juxtaposing their assumed G identity with "self"-directed ridicule and veiled critique. To put it differently, these parodists cloak themselves in the semiotic trappings of popular local artists to critique them from "the inside out," simultaneously voicing the subject of parody while retaining and (indirectly) asserting the parodist's own take on what it means to be a "real" MC in the Houston hip hop scene. It is in this way that we observe a nuanced type of double-voicing (Bakhtin 1984) through the juxtaposition of an assumed style and persona with the parodists' typical, on-mic personae, contextually-present for in-group audiences to whom the veiled critique is aimed.[60]

Key here is the idea that social actors in the Houston hip hop scene share norms in dissonance, and that these norms connect rhetorical strategies and texts[61] to dominant stances, aesthetics, and values. These short texts crystallize into transposable chunks of language, themselves semiotically complex and multilayered. For instance, the commonly-recontextualized phrase, "Swangin' [sweiŋIn] through the South [sa:Φ]," referentially depicts a social practice linked directly with place, i.e. driving one's car from side-to-side ('swangin') through the streets of Houston's South side. This practice becomes tethered not simply to place, but rather an experience of place, fleshed out by qualities popular artists portray themselves as possessing, such as street-sensibility, aversion to "outsider" systems of social regulation (e.g. police), and hyper-masculinity. Furthermore, as illustrated through the broad transcriptions of the words "Swangin'" and

[60] That is, the musically-socialized audience sensistive to the political economy of local hip hop culture.
[61] In the sense of Agha (2007).

"South," this entextualized (Bauman & Briggs 1992) stretch of discourse contains the environments for /I/ lowering pre-engma and /aw/ monophthongization, respectively. Thus, prior texts such as the one under discussion contain words which provide artists with what Coupland (2007: 124) terms "phono-opportunities," that is, the possibility of choosing one phonetic variant over another to manage personae through vocalic variation (Coupland 2001).

It is in part through the recontextualization of texts containing environments for locally-significant phonetic variation that the embedded variables become indexically linked to the stances taken up by popular artists, producing cultural norms. To illustrate, consider the word "South:" This word contains the variable /aw/, which exhibits variation in pronunciation along the dimension of monophthongization, such that two approximate targets exist – a diphthongal variant /aU/ and a monophthongal variant /a:/. In popular Houston rap music, established artists commonly use the monophthongal variant, realizing words including "South" as [s**a:**Φ] in culturally-salient texts such as "Swangin' through the South [s**au**Φ]."

Worth noting here is the semiotic nesting doll relations in play, involving variables embedded in words which, co-occurring with other elements of language, constitute culturally-significant texts. These texts are employed in order to achieve rhetorical ends, such as taking a stance regarding affiliation with a taste culture, evoking social qualities associated with a subject position (such as the G figure of popular Houston rap), or representing one's 'hood,. For example, 'Swangin' through the South' connects artists to a particular, socially-meaningful experience of place. Drawing on Woolard's (2008:447) notion of a "semiotic house that Jack built," I suggest that the

phonetic variables bootstrap off of the cultural salience of words and phrases comprising reiterable texts or textual strategies. By virtue of their embedding in such texts, vocalic variables come to index stances taken through rhetorical positioning, including the use of metastylistic discourse.

Returning to speech about style, metastylistic discourse plays a crucial role in fleshing out the social-semiotic boundaries of a local hip hop subjectivity. This rhetorical strategy brings material elements of culture into the process of essentializing style, by selectively positioning certain practices as central to the semiotic articulation of localness and realness in Houston hip hop. Among these practices, metastylistic discourse figures centrally, indexically evoking qualities of the subjects who commonly use this boundary-construction strategy.

In this chapter, I propose that hip hop parodists exploit metastylistic discourse not only to comment on the centrality of this social practice among rhetorical resources available to MCs, but also to critique the established artists who frequently employ metastylistic discourse. Through lyrical performances and constructed dialogue, parodists challenge the skill, social logic, and authenticity of popular local hip hop artists, indirectly highlighting the socially-constructed nature of stylistic norms. I argue that the artists who parody Houston's status quo denaturalize local stylistic norms by ostensibly adhering to them, utilizing metastylistic discourse and adopting phonetic variants normatively associated with the collective voices of established rappers in Houston.

It is in this way that the parodic critiques leveled at Houston's hip hop establishment are veiled, as parodists must convince the audience that they are indeed voicing – and thereby taking up – the hustler, thug, or G subject position. However, the

parodists' lyrical content reveals that what is taking place amounts to more than imitation; critical hyperbole and "self"-directed insults aimed back at the performer create a gap between the parodic performances and the songs which inspire them. It is through examining these intertextual gaps (Bauman and Briggs 1990) that we begin to uncover which specific norms and practices are being interrogated.

Gaining these insights sheds light on the following questions, which underpin the research reported on here. First, what social-semiotic norms do established artists construct and maintain through their lyrics? Second, how do artists marginalized by these norms address an inequitable social arrangement through parody-as-social-action? Finally, what insights do we stand to gain from analysis of (hip hop) parody regarding the conventionalization of stylistic practices, in terms of both form and meaning (Sclafani 2009)?

5.3 Parody in Hip Hop: Critiquing the Status Quo

The example of hip hop parody described below comes from Ogbar's (2007) historically-oriented work on hip hop and authenticity. One recurrent theme in this work is the discursively-constructed – and often contested – nature of authenticity in rap music. Regarding the contestation of authenticity, Ogbar (2007: 113) cites qualities of popular rap music which have drawn negative critical attention from artists who question and reject the lifestyle portrayed in hip hop, both lyrically and visually, through songs and the medium of video. Of these qualities, the author focuses in detail on the rise and enduring appeal of conspicuous consumption and materialism in popular rap music. Images of expensive cars, gold and platinum jewelry, and designer clothes have had their place in

the aesthetics of hip hop (at least) since its commercialization. But this emphasis on the material is not shared by all artists.

A small number of MCs, including Philadelphia-based group "The Roots," have taken critical aim at the personae and hypermaterialistic lifestyle of the hip hop artist portrayed in popular rap music and videos. As Ogbar (113-115) notes, during the mid-nineties

> The Roots...unleashed a barrage of rhymes criticizing the gaudy fantasy world of some rappers in their sophomore LP, *illadelph halflife* (1996). In the video for "What They Do," The Roots parodied the ubiquitous materialism of rappers. With a tip of the hat to De La Soul...The Roots derided the make-believe world of their peers. The video opens with a shot of a mansion, with a caption that reads, "The Goldstein estate, day rental." In one scene, the lead rapper sits on a bed with three beautiful women. "Yeah, right," the screen reads. Sitting in front of high-priced automobiles, the caption asks, "Can we afford this?"

In the video to which Ogbar refers, The Roots criticize popular artists who portrayed themselves as larger than life figures, in a rags-to-riches tale, who came to enjoy the material and social trappings of the uber-wealthy. However, as the video seeks to make clear, even among those rappers who have succeeded and have a budget to shoot a video, the opulent lifestyle involving expensive cars, three-storey estates, and conspicuous consumption more often than not proves to be a façade, a show put on to construct

personae and portray a lifestyle unattainable not only by most hip hop fans, but also by the artists who circulate these fantastic images of the successful rapper's life.

Key to the parodic critique leveled by The Roots at hip hop's then status quo, the artists take up the generic conventions of popular hip hop (videos), in this case specifically the excessive displays of material success and all that comes with it (women, wealth, etc.). For example, as Ogbar mentions, the video begins with a shot of a luxurious estate where, presumably, one of the artists from the video lives. This opening sequence puts The Roots video in dialogue with other, prior hip hop videos set at an elaborate estate or exotic location. However, The Roots' video turns this portrayal of the hip hop artist as tremendously affluent on its head, by juxtaposing images of opulence with captions which pull back the curtain, revealing the reality behind many similar videos: Though they attempt to portray the rappers as the wealthy elite, much of this is appearance only, as the captions make clear.

As a deauthenticating strategy, these captions prove central to the critique being leveled, as they stand in stark contrast with the images of excess in the video (shaking up and pouring out champagne bottles, e.g.). In fact, by considering the visual language and lyrics of the video vis-à-vis prior popular videos, we see both continuity and rupture, seams and gaps. As already mentioned, continuity is achieved by exploiting established conventions for visually constructing larger-than-life personae. However, this semiotic continuity is disrupted by the juxtaposition of images ostensibly portraying the outcome of hip hop success with captions which function to deauthenticate the lifeworld portrayed in the video.

It is here that we benefit from Bauman and Briggs' (1992: 149) notion of intertextual gaps. As the authors propose,

> One the one hand, texts framed in some genres attempt to achieve generic transparency by *minimizing* the distance between texts and genres, thus rendering the discourse maximally interpretable through the use of generic precedents. This approach sustains highly conservative, traditionalizing modes of creating textual authority. On the other hand, *maximizing* and highlighting these intertextual gaps underlies strategies for building authority through claims of individual creativity and innovation... resistance to the hegemonic structures associated with established genres, and other motives for distancing oneself from textual precedents.

Here, drawing on Bauman and Briggs' terms, we may view the multi-modal video as the text, and the genre of the popular hip hop video as a normative framework. In the case of rappers seeking to maintain the status quo of popular hip hop, directors and artists craft videos and songs which "minimize the distance" between text and genre. However, in the case of parodic hip hop performance, artists seek to maximize and openly highlight intertextual gaps, as in the case of The Roots song and video "What They Do?" Specifically, The Roots combine the use of captions which deauthenticate images of opulence with lyrics which openly critique the materialism of the status quo in popular rap, as in the following example:

The Roots: "What They Do?"

1 The principles of true hip-hop have been forsaken

2 It's all contractual and about money makin

3 Pretend-to-be cats don't seem to know they limitation

4 Exact replication and false representation

In this passage, Roots front man Blackthought actually calls attention to the minimization of intertextual gaps by popular artists in Line 4, where he alludes to "exact replication," seemingly of generic semiotic norms for popular hip hop videos, which he immediately goes on to disparage as "false representation[s]." Returning to the process and goals of maximizing intertextual gaps, we observe that Blackthought and his group level their critique lyrically and through captions while visually establishing some continuity between this video and the genre of videos under critique. It is here that we encounter a disjunct between conventionalized generic norms and the production of a multi-modal text which calls attention to and criticizes these norms. Thus, by maximizing the intertextual gap between their song and songs circulated by the popular artists under critique, The Roots manage to mount "resistance to the hegemonic structures associated with [an established genre]," (Bauman and Briggs 1992: 149) in this case the rags-to-riches genre of popular hip hop music.

This example puts into play several key concepts drawn on in the analysis presented later, in §4. Foremost among these concepts is the notion of intertextual gaps, specifically the effects of minimizing and maximizing gaps between the performance of a text and the generic set of norms with which it is associated. In the following section, I describe what I and others view as the status quo in Houston hip hop. Regarding

intertextuality, in §3 I discuss how popular, established artists maintain a stylistic monopoly on indigeneity and authenticity by minimizing the intertextual gaps between the performance of (authoritative) hip hop texts and generic norms linked to the performance and construction of these texts.

5.4 Some Perspective: Maintaining the Status Quo in Houston

In talking about generic norms vis-à-vis Houston rap music, I propose that social actors involved in local hip hop orient to such norms, even if in dissonance for example, to reject or subvert them. These norms sediment over time, as established Houston artists continue to essentialize indigeneity and authenticity through lyrics crafted to distinguish local hip hop culture from cultural forms associated with other geographically-bound scenes. For example, established local artist Mike Jones speaks openly about what he thinks about when asked to reflect on what makes Houston distinct. In an interview with Matt Sonzala in widely-read hip hop magazine *The Source*, Mike Jones says the following regarding his album *Who Is Mike Jones?*: "*Who is Mike Jones?* was simple. It was about me being fly…I'm from H-Town. I sip lean. I ride candy paint. Grills in the mouth, diamonds shining. I love where I'm from. I'm proud of that." (Sonzala 2006:61) Here, Mike Jones appeals to a number of social practices portrayed as essential to Houston hip hop culture, including those associated with car culture (riding "candy paint"), drug culture (sippin' lean), and fashion (wearing "grills," custom fit, diamond-encrusted jewelry worn over one's teeth).

In short, this rhetorical strategy enables established artists to position certain stylistic practices centrally among the repertoire of signifying acts utilized in establishing one's indigeneity in popular Houston rap music. That is, by recontexualizing recurrent ways of talking about and framing localness and indigeneity in popular Houston rap music, established artists minimize the intertextual gaps between performances which focus on localness and authenticity. As Bauman and Briggs (1992: 149) note, it is through "*minimizing* the distance between texts and genres" that social actors sustain "highly conservative, traditionalizing modes of creating textual authority."

In the case of Houston hip hop, established artists minimize intertextual gaps potentiated by generic norms for asserting one's authenticity and indigeneity, norms which involve the deployment not only of rhetorical strategies, but also short stretches of discourse (i.e. texts) which become entextualized through their recontextualization by other artists. Established rappers maintain discursive authority regarding issues of localness and authenticity by re-using these texts, often verbatim, across performances. The transportability of such texts is exemplified by Mike Jones' response to the question posed by Sonzala, cited above. In his response, Jones claims to "sip lean" and "ride candy paint," two social practices communicated by conventionalized, culturally-salient phrases (i.e. short texts).

Oftentimes, as discussed in §4.2, these short, re-usable texts contain socially-significant phonetic variants, including monophthongal /aw/ (e.g. [da:n] = 'down') and lowered /i/ pre-engma (e.g. [Φeiŋ] = 'thing'). These linguistic variables add an additional dimension of calibration regarding the minimization (or maximization) of intertextual gaps. That is, in texts which contain the environment for variation, phonetic differences

enter into the equation, yielding an opportunity for rappers to further minimize the intertextual gaps between current and prior performances. Rappers may do so by exploiting pronunciation variants generically and stylistically associated not only with the production of authoritative texts such as "Still Tippin,'" but also (more broadly) with the construction of street-oriented, on-mic personae.

Along similar lines, subversive artists – those who might side with Fat Tony's assessment of the "Houston stereotype" – exploit intertextual precedents for communicating senses of authenticity and rootedness in order to voice the subject of their critique. MCs who take on this role of parodist both minimize and maximize intertextual gaps in their performances. These artists minimize gaps, for example, in the replication of phonetic variation and the (re-)use of metastylistic discourse. By minimizing intertextual gaps along these dimensions, parodists ostensibly "take up" the subject position associated with the stylistic practices in question – metastylistic discourse and phonetic variation. However, artists engaged in parody must also maximize intertextual gaps, for example, through rhetorical strategies which render the content of metastylistic discourse questionable, in some way undesirable. In the next section, I examine how parodists minimize intertextual gaps to take on the voice of the critiqued subject, while maximizing intertextual gaps along other textual dimensions in order to criticize and denaturalize the textual authority of established artists.

5.5 Hicp hop parody: A qualitative view of veiled critique

The material which serves as the basis for my analysis comes from a song circulated on the internet in 2008, titled "My Swag," performed by an artist who calls himself Lil Big Yung. This artists is, in fact, King Midas of Houston-based hip hop group "H.I.S.D.", and

"My Swag" is Midas' parodical take on popular rap in Houston (and beyond). What makes this song significant from a theoretical perspective, among other things, is the fact that it has been mistaken as imitation and not parody by listeners, as evidenced from a long discussion on an internet hip hop forum.[62] This "misinterpretation" begs the following questions: In which ways is Midas' song parodical, and how does the audience recognize it as such?

To address these questions, I shall first reproduce the lyrics of the song, transcribed in full below. Following the transcription, I describe ways in which Midas has taken up a G persona conducive to generic norms in popular Houston rap music. Specifically, I examine semiotic strategies the parodist employs to minimize intertextual gap(s) between "Lil Big Yung's" performance and the prior performances of established artists. As I shall argue, minimizing these gaps allows Midas to construct the social persona(e) associated with intertextual precedents. However, what follows is far from straightforward imitation of these precedents for self-portraying a "hard" (extremely tough and self-reliant), neighborhood-rooted, street-hustler image. On the contrary, by maximizing semiotic gaps between "My Swag" and the intertextual series (Hanks 1986, Hill 2005) comprising similar prior performances, Midas presents a veiled commentary on the naturalness and desirability of the subjectivity portrayed as unequivocally local and "real" in popular (Houston) hip hop discourse.

Lil Big Yung: "My Swag"

1 Yo, yo,

2 I got my shades on

[62] At the time I write this, the discussion can be found at http://www.rappersiknow.com/2008/10/27/lil-big-yung-my-swag/

I got my J's on

I got these niggas crunk when I say "Mayne" [mei:n] ho

it be my swag nigga, I'm so crazy

I'm such a pimp nigga hold on pay me

what they say nigga, they wanna battle who?

I spit so loud I write rhymes in capitals

nigga my fitty don't fit I'm the shit

my medallion is the license to spit bitch,

I got my skateboard, I got my vans on,

my crotch kinda tight feel like a tampon,

I make it rain bitches, I got fifty cars,

I'm sippin lean, eatin chicken in a titty bar

nigga I kill you, and then I kill me

and then I press it up and put it on a CD

[chorus]

I'm gon live it how I spit it I'm keepin it tight

Every city sittin pretty he keepin the mic

Lil Big Yung and livin that luxury life

I got a cup nigga drankin it every night

I got them keys that can open like every door

Fifty cars, every plane that's ever been known

Onion booty girls feelin my underoos [end chorus]

I got my head cocked, I got my shirt tucked
just in the front nigga posin like its MURDA,
I'm Lil Big Yung, I'm iced down [da:n] baby,
I got that block hot, four pits with rabies,
I got my chest right, I got my stomach rippled
I got four broads, big booties with no dimples
I got a new gang, we rockin polka dots
We fashionable thugs, whatchu boys talkin bout [b:at]
Nigga I sign you, just to drop you
And diss you, to get pressed into projects I do
Its Lil Big Yung, fuck them old niggas,
they bout them lyrics but we all about them tones nigga
Them niggas stackin paper, I got a million quarters,
I got a professor in the lab makin fumes with water
It's lil big yung and the king so don't front
cuz new niggas is here given 'em what they want (check the swag)

[repeat chorus]

[begin outro]

Check ths out, so like every Tuesday mayne I go to the store right, you know going to get groceries and shit mayne, he be comin to me talkin bout mayne you know, "I see what you doin, tryin to get yo paper but, Nigga

> you can't rap dog, like you doin music but you ain't really sayin nothin mayne you just repeatin words and shit like that," you know all that shit old niggas be talkin bout, talking bout getting grown and shit like that mayne...

As I suggested earlier, to parody someone or a type of person, one critiques the parodied subject from "the inside out." In other words, the parodists must adhere to some of the generic norms which guide the critiqued subject's performance and construction of persona(e). In doing so, rappers who perform parody put on the mask of "the other," the person or social type being critiqued. It is only by putting on this mask, by adopting stylistic practices associated with popular rappers, that Midas can level a "self"-directed critique at the status quo of Houston hip hop. Below, I briefly describe five semiotic strategies Midas and his producer exploit to put on a parodic mask, beginning not with lyrics, but with the instrumental music over which the parodist raps.

As journalists have noted (Frere-Jones 2005, Sonzala 2006), Houston has become distinctive and well-known in part for the "Screwed down" sound of popular, locally-produced music. What makes this music (both the instrumental beat and vocals) distinctive involves adhering to precedents set by one of the progenitors of Houston's unique sound, DJ Screw. Championed by many locals as the catalyst for Houston's growing notoriety as a hotbed of hip hop talent in the mid 2000's, Screw's signature was[63] to record artists rapping over instrumentals, then slow the completed track down considerably in post-production. The result became a seemingly homologous soundtrack

[63] Regrettably, DJ Screw passed away November 16, 2000.

to thousands of Houstonians "swangin'" their "S.L.A.B.s"[64] slowly, side to side, through the streets of local neighborhoods.

Slowing down or "Screwing" tracks became generically associated with locally-popular hip hop. That is, changing the tempo of the finished musical product got swept up in the emergence of generic norms for communicating a socially-positioned experience of place. In this way, Screw and the artists with whom he worked set intertextual precedents for communicating their indigeneity through a specific semiotic tactic – slowing down or "Screwing" the music. Midas and his producer adopt this strategy by manipulating the speed of the finished product, slowing it down to match the pace of Screw's music. In doing so, the artists achieve continuity with prior popular hip hop performances bearing the same, trademark sound. It is through this strategy that Midas minimizes the gap between his performance and existent, popular local hip hop music. Thus, through adopting Screw's slowed-down style, the artist takes one step toward putting on a parodic mask, adopting semiotic strategies associated with popular local artists.

Beyond the instrumental framing of the performance, Midas employs a number of tactics in order to voice or style his parodic persona. For example, the artist adopts colloquial terms frequently used by popular rappers, terms which not only evoke spatialized experience, but which also refer to practices constitutive of this experience. For example, in line 4, Lil Big Yung[65] says "I got these niggas crunk, when I say 'Mayne' ho." Here, the key word is "mayne," a phono-lexical variant of "man" which, in popular Houston hip hop parlance, can be used to express positively the rappers active

[64] "Slow loud and bangin," slang for a car with loud speakers and aftermarket accessories.
[65] When in character, I refer to Midas by his performance name.

engagement and unfolding stylistic craftsmanship during an improvisational rap or "freestyle." Though used outside of Houston, the term "mayne" is strongly tied to the tradition of improvisational rap built around DJ Screw and the hip hop culture of Houston's South side.

Thus, indexically linked to specific people, particular performances, and a collectively-portrayed lifestyle-of-an-MC, the recontextualization of "mayne" in Lil Big Yung's performance functions to create continuity, to minimize the gap between "My Swag" and authoritative texts such as the enduringly-popular mixtapes for which DJ Screw became famous. It is in this way that the parodist cuts a discursive figure (Agha 2007), one which bears a resemblance to already-known artists and culturally-recognizable social types – including the social relation of "thug" – in the field of hip hop.

By speaking other people's words (Bauman 2001; cf. Bakhtin 1984), the parodist evokes a subject position already-constructed through the lyrics and visual images of popular Houston rap songs and videos. In using and drawing focus to the culturally-charged word "mayne," Midas effectively puts on the mask, as it were, of the person(ae) he aims to critique.

Rhetorical strategies, such as metastylistic discourse and self-categorization, also function in Midas' service to create continuity between Lil Big Yung's performance and popular local hip hop songs. Established artists use both of these strategies to connect personae, place, and practice lyrically, in order to flesh out their on-mic personae. By employing metastylistic discourse, these artists communicate a distinctive experience of place, an experience tethered to the rhetoric of realness and authenticity in popular rap

music. In portraying Houston as distinctive among other scenes in the hip hop market, established artists engage – intentionally or not – in a form of social-semiotic boundary construction. Specifically, by presenting a narrow range of social practices as central to the lived experience of a Houston rapper, MCs with major record deals take the reins in representing the city, what it means in social-semiotic terms to be a Houston rapper. Through metastylistic discourse, popular artists such as Houston local Big Moe weave stylistic practices together with place identity and self-identification, portraying a lifestyle and referring to those who live (or claim to live) it by using terms for reified social positions. Such positions include the "G" figure in line 5 below. Shorthand for "gangsta" (but not necessarily coextensive with this term), a G is the (street) hustler *par excellence*: "On the grind," credible in the streets, and in control (of himself or whatever affairs in which he is involved). In the following passage, artist Big Moe portrays himself engaged in the practice of drinking a codeine-laced beverage "drank" and then he "represents," or lays claim to, the city he calls home. The passage ends with Moe self-identifying as a G.

Big Moe: "City of Syrup"

1 It's Big Moe drank baby
2 I done came down,
3 I done came down,
4 Up out H-Town,
5 Up out H-Town,
6 And you know I'm a throwed G...

This excerpt illustrates how popular rappers, in crafting their personae, utilize metastylistic discourse to evoke a lifestyle of which "sippin' drank" is only partially constitutive. This is the lifestyle of a G, the colloquial label which reifies the gendered and classed social position of a drank-sippin', wood wheel grippin' rapper who "shows love to," represents, and anchors himself to his city. Through acts of self-presentation, such as Big Moe's excerpt above, established local artists link social types – such as the G figure – to an indigeneity made tangible through reference to social practices partially constitutive of the G lifestyle.

It is through the construction of reified social relations such as the G that artists, including Big Moe, set intertextual precedents for taking on the G persona. These precedents partially comprise a conventionalized, generic framework for "doing local" – as well as "being real" – in Houston hip hop. This framework includes the five semiotic strategies discussed so far: (1) adoption of Screw's slowed-down style; (2) adoption of socially-charged linguistic variants, generically linked to the performance of popular local rap music; (3) adoption of colloquial terms and the recontextualization of prior texts; (4) the use of metastylistic discourse to emplace, authenticate, and communicate a lived experience of place; and (5) taking up a subject position in the social landscape through the rhetorical act of self-identification.

By adopting and recontextualizing each of these genre-specific strategies, Midas voices or, to put it another way, takes up the socially-recognizable and available subject position of the G, a discursive figure constructed in and through popular hip hop music. Using generic semiotic strategies associated with this figure allows Midas to put on the parodic mask, minimizing intertextual gaps between Lil Big Yung's performance and

prior authoritative texts. It is in these ways that Midas portrays the lifestyle of a fictive hip hop G, Lil Big Yung.

However, what the artist achieves rhetorically cannot be reduced to mere imitation. Creating continuity with popular prior texts by minimizing gaps is necessary in order to make the audience aware of what is being parodied. Minimizing these intertextual gaps is only part of the parodic process though. For the performance to take on the generic quality of parody, Midas must both minimize and maximize intertextual gaps, as doing so creates a necessary tension in the performance between rhymes that adhere to local generic conventions and tactics for troping on these conventions. Below I describe two of these tactics, beginning with what I term critical hyperbole.

It is not uncommon for rappers to make use of hyperbole in the service of self-aggrandizement, as we see in line 9 of the Lil Big Yung passage. Here, the artist says "I spit [i.e. rap] so loud I write rhymes in capitals." However, hyperbole in hip hop performance may have other effects, especially when what is being exaggerated or brought into focus effectively portrays the artist in a negative light. In such cases, certain genre-specific norms and those who adhere to them come under attack. These norms include beliefs shared by hip hop artists and fans regarding which subject positions are perceived as locally authentic, in line with the essentializing discourse of Houston rap music. The subject position of interest here is that of the G.

As a genre, (popular) Houston hip hop limits the range of subject positions rappers may successfully take up while simultaneously laying claim to a spatialized authenticity. This generic framework for "doing local" in popular Houston rap music is in a continuous state of "becoming," (Volosinov 1986) (re)produced by established artists

who orient to intertextual precedents for self-presentation. These precedents include portraying oneself as a G lyrically, emphasizing characterological qualities such as toughness, self-reliance, physical prowess, and an up-for-anything outlook on resolving conflicts to save/maintain face. In "My Swag," Lil Big Yung portrays himself as a G while highlighting the absurd lengths some artists go to lyrically in order to demonstrate how "hard" they are. "My Swag" achieves this metacommentary on the naturalness or desirability of being a G by using hyperbole to attack this subject.

For example, in lines 16-17, Lil Big Yung claims "Nigga I kill you, and then I kill me / and then I press it up and put it on a CD." Here, the parodist brings into focus the kind of hyperbole used by popular artists to bolster their bravado. In this case though, Lil Big Yung stretches the use of hyperbole to absurd, undesirable limits. For instance, in lines 16-17 of "My Swag," the artist evokes the threats of violence that popular artists issue in the service of self-aggrandizement. However, Lil Big Yung undermines the rhetorical force of these on-mic threats by portraying them as nothing more than ploys to sell more music, claims to power with no basis in reality (i.e. rappers cannot "press up" music and sell it on a CD after they have killed themselves). In this way then, the parodist maximizes the intertextual gap between "My Swag" and local songs which use hyperbole differently, to exaggerate positive qualities of the rapper or negative qualities of other rappers. In our case, Lil Big Yung's use of hyperbole functions as veiled commentary on the desirability of exaggerated threats and the type of rappers who issue them.

This veiled commentary relies on contextual knowledge possessed by the audience. As suggested earlier, not all listeners share the local knowledge requisite to know what interpretational frame (parodic/non-parodic, e.g.) is being keyed through

performance (Bauman 2001a, Goffman 1974). For instance, to fully appreciate Midas' critique, the audience must be familiar not only with popular local rap music, but also with the music of marginalized hip hop culture(s) in Houston. The disparities between local hip hop social formations are not unfamiliar to Midas, nor the artists he works with, nor their fans. Mutually-calibrated in some measure then, these subculturalists co-construct the veiled critique described in this chapter by participating in activities – ranging from attending shows to playing rap music in the minivan – that both circulate stances and socialize participants.

In part, this socialization consists in becoming familiar with points of contention among local hip hop cultures, including what sort of personae – the thug or the laid-back lyricist – should represent Houston through rap lyrics and videos. Knowledge of this issue deepens one's understanding, for example, of the following instance of ironic, "self"-directed critique. The scare quotes around "self" hint at the fact that the artist has put on the parodic mask of the other, so by aiming critical commentary at himself, Midas critiques the other; that is, he takes aim at artists like Lil Big Yung. In lines 31-32, the artist-in-mask forces a collision between two social domains familiar in hip hop, the thug lifestyle and the world of fashion: "I got a new gang, we rockin' polka dots / We fashionable thugs, what you boys talkin' bout [ba:t]." Though style is central to articulating identities in rap music, bringing into focus trendy clothing and fashion while simultaneously claiming to be a thug in a gang opens a window onto Midas' perspective on the rhetoric surrounding the subject position of a G or a thug.

By juxtaposing a hyper-masculine, street-oriented social type with a love of polka-dotted clothing (and fashion more generally), the parodist invites us to examine the

fit between two social constructs: "Thug-ness" and "trendiness (in clothing)." I propose that bringing together these two constructs evokes some measure of contradiction, which is grafted onto the type of artist Lil Big Yung represents. In this way, Midas manages to portray the G or thug as problematically obsessed with self-image, a quality which undermines the "harder" characterological dimension of being a thug. Thus, through "self"-directed ironic critique, the parodist challenges the social logic of being a thug through metacommentary, a social end achieved not through lyrics alone, but also by exploiting the target audience's local knowledgeable of the thug or G figure.

Furthermore, by undermining his own social status as a thug, Lil Big Yung maximizes an intertextual gap along the dimension of self-aggrandizement, a rhetorical strategy normatively associated with the genre of popular Houston rap music. In doing so, the parodist creates discontinuity across texts, raising flags for those attuned to the discord between popular local rap and the competing hip hop culture in which Midas undeniably participates. Thus, by highlighting an intertextual gap based on a generic norm regarding self-aggrandizement, Midas as Lil Big Yung mounts "resistance to the hegemonic structures associated with established genres [i.e. popular Houston rap]," "...distancing [himself] from textual precedents." (Bauman and Briggs 1992: 149).

These two preceding examples of veiled critique thus involve strategies for inviting the audience to co-construct a reflexive critique of overlapping subject positions strongly associated with one local hip hop social formation. In the first example, we saw how hyperbole can be used critically to question the primacy of being "hard" in hip hop discourse. The second example illustrates how irony and "self"-critique can function to undermine the social logic which gives shape and meaning to the thug subject position. In

the third and final example of veiled criticism, the parodist again uses a kind of ventriloquism, in this case, constructed dialogue between Lil Big Yung and an older hip hop fan.

This example differs from the second in that, instead of voicing his critique through Lil Big Yung, Midas crafts a more direct attack on the lyrical abilities of popular Houston rappers by having an antagonistic "other" openly question and disparage Lil Big Yung's skills. The parodist places this more explicit commentary at the end of the performance, in a short narrative about an encounter Lil Big Yung has with an older fan of hip hop. In some measure, this final act of critique encapsulates a core criticism of the thug or G subject position, namely, that those artists who claim to be a G possess less skill than artists who reflexively focus on lyrical adroitness, hip hop tradition, and artistry – in other words, rappers like Midas.

To achieve this final critique, the parodist constructs a dialogue in which Lil Big Yung speaks with an older fan of hip hop, who plainly says the following: "I see what you doin, tryin to get yo paper [i.e. money] but, Nigga you can't rap dog, like you doin music but you ain't really sayin nothin mayne, you just repeatin words and shit like that." In this excerpt, instead of "self"-directed critique, the parodist employs a form of ventriloquism to voice his opinion: Artists like Lil Big Yung do not skillfully rap.

Central here is the clash between the values and aesthetics of many popular Houston rappers and a loosely-knit social formation of local artists who build on and localize traditional elements of hip hop, a non-indigenous musical form in historical perspective. This clash largely revolves around differences in classed perspectives on materialism, consumption, and what it means to be both "a man" and an MC in the

context of Houston hip hop. By embedding critique through constructed dialogue in the parody, Midas takes a position on the conflict between what some locals call "mainstream rap" and a counter-current in the Houston hip hop scene. This current or social formation comprises young, college-educated Black men whose current middle-class lifestyle and enduring commitment to hip hop as an art form meshes poorly with the G subject position championed by many popular local rappers. Though these two fluid social formations clash along a number of dimensions, Midas chooses to close his critique by ridiculing the lyrical abilities of popular Houston rappers. I propose that this choice speaks to the significance of valuing hip hop as art more than as a form of hustling to the social formation Midas elevates at the expense of popular local rap.

5.6 Summary

Through examining some of the strategies underpinning hip hop parody in this chapter, I have sought to throw light on how social actors draw on shared cultural knowledge to critique the aesthetics and values of a dominant social formation. This shared knowledge in part comprises normative ideas regarding generic, intertextual precedents for taking up a G subject position in the field of popular Houston hip hop. Key here is the social history of discourse, particularly the prior, authoritative texts produced by established rappers with access to institutionalized channels of circulation and distribution. These artists, as I suggested at the outset of the chapter, make use of a practice I term metastylistic discourse in order to fashion a G persona, connected to the 'hood, and possessing characterological qualities associated with this subject position (resolve, physical prowess, being "down for anything" when conflict arises, etc.). Thus, rapping about stylistic practices enables artists to flesh out personae by describing the lifestyle of which

these practices are partially constitutive. In this way and through explicit labeling, established rappers reify the G subjectivity.

This process involves repeated reference to a narrow range of social practices and personal qualities, portrayed as central to and distinctive of local, lived experience. It is through this type of semiotic boundary construction that popular artists establish a semiotic framework for self-portrayal as a G. This framework, or fluid set of intertextual precedents, gets swept up in the work of representation, through which the thug or G experience of place becomes discursively naturalized in and through Houston hip hop. This naturalization of style and (locally-available) personae yields a problematic situation for artists whose personal biographies, values, and lifestyle mesh poorly with the stereotypical image of a Houston rapper.

This hegemonic social image and a collective recognition of its existence disadvantage those artists who do not identify with the G or thug subject position. It is in this way that "local rap" becomes political, as certain social perspectives stand at the margins of an essentializing rhetoric. In the interest of staking out a unique place for themselves in the local scene, rappers whose perspectives are marginalized take aim at the aesthetics and values of popular Houston rap music. Though in some cases these artists directly challenge prevailing norms regarding self-presentation in local hip hop cultural production, they also level veiled critiques at popular rap(pers) through parodic songs, such as "My Swag" by Lil Big Yung (more commonly known as King Midas of the group H.I.S.D.).

Through parody-as-social-action, artists such as Midas launch an indirect critique of popular rappers who claim to represent the city in which they all live. To effectively

manage this parodic critique, Midas "stylizes" (Bakhtin 1984, Chun 2007 Coupland 2001a) or recontextualizes extant stylistic practices associated with popular local hip hop, practices in which the parodist does not normally engage. It is through recontextualization of such practices that Midas minimizes intertextual gaps between Lil Big Yung's performance and prior, authoritative texts. Doing so allows the artist to temporarily put on a parodic mask, taking up the subject position of "the other" by styling the G subject position Midas aims to critique. By orienting to and reproducing intertextual precedents set by popular rappers, such as the use of metastylistic discourse and socially-charged phonetic variants, Midas positions himself to critique popular rap music indirectly, "from the inside out."

Identifying stylistic practices adopted by the parodist to minimize intertextual gaps yields insights regarding shared knowledge of generic norms which mediate the production of local hip hop. These norms include a collective orientation to the range of socially-differentiable personae associated with and representative of popular local rap, such as the thug, hustler, pimp, or G. In self-identifying as both a thug and a pimp, Lil Big Yung highlights one target of Midas' critique, specifically, rappers who identify with these subject positions. Moreover, by selectively rapping about particular stylistic practices and characterological traits, Midas provides us with insights regarding which practices and qualities a musically-socialized audience associates with the construction of (legitimate) personae in popular local hip hop.

To arrive at this conclusion, we must appreciate the collaborative role of the (target) audience in co-constructing Midas' parodic critique. Some measure of mutual calibration regarding generic hip hop norms undergirds the performance and makes the

parody possible, since interpreting "My Swag" as parodic depends in part on an audience knowledgeable of competing hip hop cultures in Houston. This claim is supported by the online debate, mentioned in §4, regarding whether Lil Big Yung is "for real" or an artist-in-mask, taking a shot at the status quo. Arguably, the fact that some people who listened to the song posted remarks indicating that they did not perceive "My Swag" as parodic suggests that these listeners lacked the shared knowledge that Midas exploits to level his critique. This observation speaks to the socially-distributed, fragmented nature of discourse: In the case of the online debate, people sensitive to the political economy of local hip hop pointed out that the rapper in "My Swag" was actually somewhat of a ventriloquist's dummy, enabling Midas to put his words in the mouths of constructed characters, such as Lil Big Yung and the old person who disparages him in the outro of the song.

Interpreting Midas' performance as a parody also depends on rhetorical cues, intertextual gaps which help key a parodic frame of interpretation. By maximizing particular gaps between prior texts and Lil Big Yung's performance, the parodist creates discontinuity with authoritative texts, calling attention to what is said to maximize the gap. In part, it is in this way that Midas cues his audience to listen "between the lines," to examine the performance as veiled critique.

For example, regarding the generic normativity of self-aggrandizement, the parodist juxtaposes "self"-directed critique with the generic use of metastylistic discourse, through which Midas attacks Lil Big Yung and rappers like him. We see this strategy in line 24, in the chorus, where the parodist describes well-endowed women ("onion booty girls") intimately touching his "underoos," a type of made-to-match

underwear worn by children. Here, Midas undermines Lil Big Yung's masculinity by portraying him in "little boys'" underpants. It is through this type of juxtaposition that Midas breaks with intertextual precedents for self-aggrandizement and invites the audience to read the text not as a "straight" performance, but as the type of performance in which ridiculing oneself makes sense. Coupled with shared knowledge of the Houston hip hop scene, these cues lead musically-socialized listeners to a parodic reading of the text, as evidenced by the number of online listeners who identified "My Swag" as a vehicle for critique.

Finally, I propose that Midas' parody speaks to the issue of agency in language use. Specifically, "My Swag" exemplifies how social actors draw on presumed shared knowledge of generic and stylistic norms in order to bring convention and the status quo into focus and critique them. As Carter (2007) suggests (citing Butler (2004)), though our actions may be mediated by historical precedents which sediment as norms, we exercise some form of agency in recognizing these norms and calling them into question, as Midas does through hip hop parody.

Chapter Six

Rhetorical Asymmetries in Self-Presentation

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, stylistic normativity arises through the complex imbrication of intertextual circulation and micro-level uptake in local interactions. Social actors participating in (any current of) Houston hip hop look to prior texts, to precedents shaped by recurrent use of cohesive textual elements in performances. Social icons – as both individuals and the social "types" to which they lend pragmatic resonance – shape and reshape stylistic precedents through the recontextualizatization of rhetorical strategies, tactics which reify, spatialize, and evoke a dynamic subject position – the G. Popular artists, as social icons, play a key role in portraying this lived experience of place in stylistic terms – emplacing, categorizing, and fleshing out a G subjectivity through reference to locally-salient social practices (i.e. metastylistic discourse).

Through the use and reuse of metastylistic discourse, self-categorization, and emplacement, popular artists collectively essentialize the G subjectivity. They do so by portraying Houston as culturally distinct from other spatially-circumscribed "scenes" (Bennett & Peterson 2004) or "locales." (Giddens 1984) Social icons including Lil Keke, Paul Wall, and Slim Thug (see §6.5) represent their city and their 'hoods to the world, in part, through reference to social practices – ways-of-being tied to experiences of place through lyrics and the visual language of video.

To isolate these cohesive social practices, we must consider the place of material cultural elements in social models of local style, including the significance of car culture, drug culture, and fashion. Key here is the intertextuality and indexicality of *referring*, that is, recurrent ways of evoking the relationship between personae and place via reference to culturally-charged social practices. Consider schematic knowledge of these practices as analagous to our knowledge of verbs; they involve generic, conventionalized parameters (cf. argument structure), much in the same way verbs evoke a frame of experiential reference (Fillmore 1982). This frame includes participants in the event expressed by the verb, as does the frame associated with a given social practice, such as "swangin'" or "comin' dahn" (acts express through verbs). These events, these social practices, evoke characterlogical qualities associated with one who "swangs," the agent engages in a particular practice.

For instance, the qualities attributed to someone "swangin" are in part communicated or made relatable by labels which reify subject positions associated with swangin'. Artists recontextualize labels such as G, "thug," "hood," and "hustla" to take up these socially-available subject positions. In so doing, popular artists – particularly rappers with institutional support (i.e. social icons) – lay down a social history of discourse (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003), an intertextual series (Hanks 1986, Hill 2005) which gives rise to some measure of coherence across texts – potentiating (indirect) indexicalities (Hall 2005). These indexicals "point to" social categories indirectly, by evoking qualities which give the categories form. Over time, similarities across instances of use lead to fluid, transitory connections audience and performer make,

collaboratively imbuing social practices with some degree of coherence and meaning by triangulating practice, personae, and place.

6.2 "Swang:" Intertextual Series and Conventional Potentials

For example, consider a term that refers to a social practice closely tied to Houston's car culture, "swang." A sprawling metropolis, Houston neighborhoods and parks become sites where young people cruise – "swangin'" their cars from side to side – through the streets, alongside other parked cars and onlookers. This coming together through car culture creates a block party atmosphere, a community of practice (Wenger 1998, Eckert2000). Key here is the role that the word "swang" (i.e. "swing" with /I/ lowered pre-nasally) plays pragmatically, in a schematic way.

Consider again Fillmore's (1976, 1982) notion of frames as regards theorizing schematic knowledge, in this case, of swanging one's car (or S.L.A.B.[66]) in Houston's predominantly-Black neighborhoods (such as "the Tre" – mentioned in the table below). The frame that mediates shared understanding of this act minimally includes the agent, the one who swangs. To better understand who actually swangs, I present an intertextual series comprising ten cases in which Houston artists employ the word – the indexically-rich term – "swang:"

[66] Reiterating the centrality of this concept, note that the acronym S.L.A.B. stands for slow, loud, and bangin', a phrase referring to a type of car modified with aftermarket products, including chrome wheels, audio systems, and "candy-fleck," intricately-detailed paint jobs.

Table 6.1: Intertextual Series of "Swang"

Artists	Excerpts	
ESG	It's '95 yeah fool, we comes again yep to *swang*	and bang
Paul Wall	Sittin' sideways on *swang*...	/ the candy paint drippin off the frame
Slim Thug	I got the candy blue shinin when I'm *swangin*	on the boppas
S.L.A.B.	Southside, is where we gon *swang*	
Bun B	I'm from the city of the *swangs*	mayne [=man] / the land of the stains
Trae	I'm a (=gon) *swang*	my slab / lean to the left
Zeak	H-Town mayne we *swang*	on 4s
A-Dub	I'm gon *swang*	on these boppas
Kritikal	I'm *swangin*	to the Tre (=Third Ward)
Fat Tony	Hurricanes that move thangs and *swang*	trees

In this table, I have chronologically arranged the sequence of excerpts. Inspired by Hill's (2005) analysis of the intertextual series of "mañana" in mock Spanish (Hill 2005), I theorize and describe relations between the textual excerpts in Table 6.1. To begin with, the first six excerpts comprise chronological uses of the term "swang" by locally- and nationally-known artists. Taking into consideration the popularity of these artists as social icons, who play a central role in circulating linguistically-constructed images of Houston, I argue that up-and-coming artists who listen to local hip hop hear "swang" used in frequently-played songs, songs such as those from which I took the first six excerpts.

As E.S.G.'s passage from the Table suggests, the term swang has been in use at least since 1995. Given the social history of this word, I can only hint at its multi-functionality by presenting ten instances of its use. The first six lend themselves to recontextualization, as they are taken from locally-popular songs. Although no evidence

exists that the last four examples in Table 6.1 allude directly to any one of the first six, the last four excerpts – taken from songs by artists in my study – follow the first six chronologically, and so inevitably look to prior texts, prior uses of the term swang, in order to recontextualize this word. Doing so evokes elements of the frame associated with "swangin'" as a cultural practice, evoking a lived experience of place, that of the person who swangs – the G. Social practices associated with the G subjectivity include forms of participation in neighborhood-based youth cultures, such as swangin', collectively giving cultural form to Houston hip hop.

As Hill (2005) shows, it is possible to identify indexical potentials by examining sequentially-related occurrences of a particular linguistic element, produced through an internet search – for instance, as in Hill's case – or through the compilation of key-word excerpts, as in Tables 6.1 and 6.2, which draw on publicly-available cultural materials. In my first example, I have chosen local artists and extracted from their songs short stretches of discourse containing the term "swang." The table presents swang as a key word in context, with the immediately-preceding text to the left, and following text to the right. By examining the use of swang in and across contexts, we can identify and isolate elements of pragmatic continuity.

For example, in all but the last excerpt, the artists use the word "swang" to evoke a frame (or social scene) involving a car and a driver. Swang is also used to refer to the car itself, as in Bun B's statement, "I'm from the city of the *swangs*," where the artist derives a noun (the car so "swung," as it were) from the semiotically-layered verb, swang. In each of these cases, the artists refer to the practice of swangin cars back-and-

forth through their neighborhoods. Regarding the indexical potentials of this social act and its signifier, "swang," the co-text of each instance provides us with rich clues.

In four of the ten excerpts, for example, the lexeme "swang" co-occurs with a lexical item referring to place: "Southside," "H-Town," "the Tre" (a local neighborhood), and "the city of the swang." Though these excerpts were not randomly selected, the co-text suggests that there exists some connection between "swangin" and indigeneity – the two are explicitly linked in four of the extracts. Moreover, four of the remaining excerpts contain expressions and lexical items that evoke social categories ("boppas," or so-called "gold-diggin' women") and local car culture in Houston ("candy paint," "S.L.A.B."). Therefore, in 8 of 10 excerpts in Table 6.1, artists connect place directly and indirectly with car culture and the lexeme "swang."

In each of these eight stretches of discourse, the lexeme referring to "swangin" is realized with a lowered variant of /I/ (pre-engma), represented through the spelling, "swang." I argue that this phonetic realization of the word (as opposed to [swɪŋin]), as well as the recontextualization of "swang" in pragmatically-coherent contexts, converge in producing continuity across uses. The term in question evokes car culture, to which it is inextricably tied. Swangin co-occurs, or hangs together, with other social practices, including "poppin trunk" (to play music loudly), "reclin[in] the top," the installation or application of after-market audio systems, wood-grain steering wheels, twenty-inch wheels, "candy" paint, and Pirelli tires, as we see in the excerpts from Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: Intertextual Series of Car Culture References

Artists	Excerpts
ESG	*20 inch dubs* what we love dahn here
Paul Wall	*the trunk's popped,* my music's Screwed & chopped
Slim Thug	*Hand on my grain, while I'm swanging* on the way
Mike Jones	I represent the home of *candy cars,* Screw music and purple bar[67]
Lil Keke	*The S.L.A.B.* full of grass now I'm feelin like a landscaper
Bun B	The city where them boys *flip them candy-painted loads*
Big Weed	First nigga out the hood *roll 20 inches*
JB	*The tires are Pirelli* ain't shit you can tell me
A-Dub	*I'm a swang on these boys, recline the top*
Savvi	*Candy paint on the brain* we leavin stains now

I have italicized a number of lexical items in Table 5.2, words which refer to social practices through metastylistic discourse. These practices, including those listed above, are linked with "the hood," "Screw music," "The city," and "what we love **dahn** here." This last excerpt speaks to what gives shape to an experience of "the hood," the lifestyle or taste culture rhetorically linked to a sense of place (including what it *sounds* like to be a rapper from Houston).

What distinguishes Table 6.1 from 6.2 is the form of the italicized material. The first table presents cases in which the lexeme "swang" is invariably recontextualized by each artist. In Table 6.2, the data presented focus on the use and re-use of metastylistic discourse, employed here to portray car culture. In each excerpt, some lexical item or expression refers to a social practice or

[67] Codeine-laced drug.

material object linked to participation in popular hip hop culture. Thus, by searching for lexical items linked to social domains including car culture, drug culture, fashion, lived experience of place, and social categorization, I propose one way of operationalizing instances of each rhetorical strategies in question: metastylistic discourse (here, limited to three salient social domains), emplacement, and self-categorization (identified through G-related social labels). By taking this approach, it is possible to quantify uses of the rhetorical strategies in question, yielding data transformed for statistical analyses, including cluster anlaysis and the calculation of Cronbach's alpha (discussed later in detail).

Adopting these techniques has several advantages, including a more impartial way of determing how artists and social practices group or "hang" together, exhibiting asymmetrical use across the artists. I examine these patterns, more specifically, by focusings on higher- and lower-frequency usage of rhetorical strategies linked – directly or indirectly – with the articulation of G personae. Some of these rhetorical tactics evoke subject positions, such as the G, "hood nigga," hustla, or playa. Others refer to the social practices which involve the use or manipulation of material objects, including clothing, jewelry, car accessories, and more. Finally, the rhetorical act of emplacement openly links artists with a more concrete experience of place.

In this chapter, I describe how a loosely-connected network of rappers employ three rhetorical strategies, sytematically, to take on the G subjectivity through use of intertextual precedents (e.g. the "swang" series in Table 5.1). By contrast, I examine how other artists make little use of these precedents, ultimately cultivating alternative, collective-identities by framing a distinct on-mic sense of self and experience of place. In

the present case, rappers I associate with Houston's self-proclaimed undergrounds and analytically-portrayed post-underground make less, if any, use of the three rhetorical tactics under study (five counting the cultural subcomponents of metastylistic discourse). Taking into consideration the intertextual continuity that established artists produce in portraying Houston stylistically, these so-called "underground" and "post-underground" artists break with textual precedents and put forward alternative orientations to and conceptualizations of indigeneity and authenticity.

6.3 A Repertoire of Rhetorical and Material Practices

Central to an analysis along these lines is the hypothesis that the three rhetorical strategies of emplacement, metastylistic discourse, and self-categorization "hang together" (Coupland 2007), functioning in tandem to evoke a fluid taste culture, and also index a connection to place grafted onto that subcultural formation. Artists cultivating G personae orient to intertextual precedents set by prominent, local rappers, conventions which include an ever-changing, contestable core of stylistic practices that give form and meaning to indigineity in Houston hip hop. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate how car-related practices, such as swangin', as well as the rhetorical strategy which brings practices into play rhetorically – viz. metastylistic discourse – solidify schematically through recurrent recontextualizations by popular artists, across performances.

In this way, I propose that the rhetorical strategies under study come to cohere in some measure with one another, functioning in the service of articulating a G persona. Through the imbrication of references and evokations, these rhetorical tactics bring social practices involving material culture to the fore, overtly tying the material to an

("authenticated") experience of place. Take, for instance, Mike Jones' excerpt from Table 5.2 – here, coded according to the conventions described in §3.2.3:

1 *I represent the home* of ***candy cars,***

2 ***Screw music*** and ***purple bar.***

In this couplet, Jones ties place to practice, claiming to "*represent the home of*" (=emplacement) a distinct taste culture where he and other participants listen to "***Screw music***" and sip "***purple bar.***" This short couplet illustrates how, through emplacement and metastylistic discourse, hip hop artists marry material practices with a distinctive sense of place – an indigeneity associated with the G taste culture.

Among the nuanced ways rappers configure and reconfigure such complex relations between place, collectivity, and style, self-portryal as a G (or hustler, or gangsta, etc.) factors centrally in the expression of a cohesive, iconic social persona, reified and evoked through hip hop lyrics. Consider, for example, the intertextual series in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Intertextual Series of Self-Categorization as a G

Artists	**Excerpts**
Lil Keke	*G* for burnin' purple bush [=weed] on dat kush [=weed]
Fat Pat	Cuz you try to jack, a real true *G* Comin' dahn the boulevard can they see me?
Slim Thug	Everytime something new drop, it's *G* shit not hip hop
Paul Wall	Look look, if you know me then you know I'm a *G*
Head[68]	Just your average everyday *G* yup it's me
ESG	And now you know, what my real *Gs* do? / Sip syrup swang and bang...
Big Moe	Up out H-Town / and you know I'm a throwed *G* The M-O-E cocked up on three
A Dub	don't forget it I'm a *G* I ain't no R&B sanga [=singer]

[68] Of local group Botany Boys, particularly interconnected with DJ Screw.

JB	I'm so hard for a *G*
Zeak	Gonna be in Texas where *Gs* are raised

Chronologically-arranged as in the previous series, this table illustrates the coherence "G" – as social label – exhibits across recontextualizations. Again, though not a random sample, the series in Table 6.3 provides evidence that the G subject position has sedimented as something rhetorically "available." This intertextual series also provides suggestive and compelling co-textual evidence that the G persona is linked to place directly ("Texas," "H-Town," "the boulevard") and indirectly, through metastylistic discourse (smoking "kush," "comin' dahn," "sip syrup," "swang and bang," e.g.). Furthermore, artists in Table 5.3 attribute social qualities to the G figure ("hard,[69]" "real true," "average everyday G," "real Gs," "a throwed[70] G"), centering around authenticity explicitly, as well as an "everyday," "hard" type of person – a G.

In short, Table 6.3 throws light on how established artists reify, emplace, and give shape to the G subjectivity. This intertextual series also shows how such a widely-circulated term for self-categorization finds its place among the strategies other up-and-coming rappers use to take up the G subject position (e.g. A-Dub, JB, and Zeak). Other strategies include metastylistic discourse and emplacement, tactics which require us to define, as will be the case in the phonetic analysis of Chapter 7, the range of variation observed for each strategy. In order to design a useful instrument for reliably discriminating between asymmetries in the use of rhetorical tactics, we must consider the uses to which each of the three rhetorical strategies in question are put, socially, to take on the G persona or some other subject position.

[69] Word referring to being tough, hardened.
[70] Word referring to being innebriated.

Consider, for example, the social functions of emplacement. As I operationalize it in earlier chapters, this strategy involves using a term that refers to or evokes a locale, physical environs which shape – and are shaped by – language. Specifically, by employing these spatially-loaded terms, rappers establish a connection to place, claiming to represent their block, 'hood, city, or state. Local knowledge of the block or 'hood to which an artist refers provides the audience with an opportunity to collaboratively imagine experiences of that place, involving iconic figures, such as the G persona.

As I describe below, one question I ask in this analysis is whether, and to what extent, artists establish indigineitiy through emplacement. Therefore, in defining the range of variation among the instances emplacement, I restrict occurrences counted to those terms which refer to physical locales in Houston, streets, blocks, stores, or neighborhoods – place names – that holds fragmented cultural significance for participants in the local hip hop scene. Although the meanings evoked through the use of culturally-charged terms vary as widely as the experiences which give place names significance, emplacement – as a rhetorical strategy – necessarily communicates some kind of lived experience, an orientation to the local (whatever that orientation may involve).

Thus, I view instances of emplacement as, above all, sharing a common component of use in the relational work they do. Emplacment thus offers fewer analytic challenges than metastylistic discourse and self-categorization, specifically in terms of operationalizing the use of a given strategy. For instance, some MCs employ metastylistic discourse to talk nostalgically about Adidas brand sneakers and the so-called "Golden

Era" of hip hop. In such cases, the artists reflect on style, but not the popular style which currently dominates the Houston hip hop scene.

This example illustrates that metastylistic discourse – as well as self-categorization – provide social actors with the raw tools to take up various subject positions, including the G. For instance, artists may use either strategy to index or refer to socially-available personae distinct from the G. These personae – or social types – include the sometimes-derogatory label "backpacker," a term used to refer to rappers or subculturalists who orient to oppositional stylistic conventions, associated with traditional, "Golden Era" hip hop values and practices. In this way, our challenge lies in delimiting the envelope of variation, or which instances of metastylistic discourse to count.

Though self-categorization and metastylistic discourse provide social actors with flexible resources for self-presentation, I propose to limit the strategies counted to those stylistic practices clearly associated with the G figure. The decision to impose this limitation finds its basis in my goal to determine whether and to what extent artists orient to the G as a social construct in constructing on-mic identities.

Based on ethnographic field notes, interviews (conducted by me or culled from publications), conversations with hip hop participants, as well as close listenings to numerous local hip hop recordings, I selected social practices – in the case of metastylistic discourse – that established artists frequently rap about to portray themselves as Gs. Popular artists and the media (e.g. magazines, blogs, newspapers) draw attention to iconic artists and the stylistic practices aimed at cultivating this social image,

practices ranging from wearing "grillz," "swangin'," "s.l.a.b.s," "comin' dahn," "sippin' drank," wearing "starched dahn (=down) jeans," and driving cars with "candy paint."

Houston's established artists connect these practices, as we have seen in the intertextual series above, not simply with "place," but with a culturally-rich experience of place, reified through labels such as G (or hood, or gutter, or gangsta, or hustla). In listing these specific practices, instead of practices associated with other currents in local hip hop culture (underground, "post-underground"), I inescapably confront questions regarding the political dimensions of representation and style.

6.4 Two Questions and some Reflections

My questions in this work center around how social actors and institutions produce fragmentary, schematic knowledge of cultural hierarchy, including the central place held by the G in local discourse and social structure. One approch to understanding these processes consists in investigating the influence of widely-circulated, socially-statusful rap songs and the local artists who produce them. Quantifying the use of G-related rhetorical strategies in these songs makes them tractable, enabling the detection of patterns in self-presentation across artists vis-à-vis indigineity and "persona management" (Coupland 2001.

Examining these patterns uncovers complex questions. For example, by exploring the asymmetrical usage of rhetorical strategies – tactics tied both to place and a spatialized subjectivity – I address the following questions:

(1) How and to what extent do local rappers rhetorically "play up" being from Houston specifically, or (some) place more generally?

(2) How and to what extent do particular artists portray themselves as Gs?

Answering these questions throws light not only on the interrelatedness of indigineity and the G persona, but also on the political implications of this discursively-constructed relationship. Specifically, when artists play up their connection to place, they must consider the cultural value of intertextual precedents that circumscribe the sociocultural dimensions of indigineity. Despite this influential social history of discourse, artists who do not orient to the G persona may draw on emplacement as a tactic, for instance, to reframe indigeneity, rejecting schematic portrayals of the G's persona as distinctively representative of Houston. In such cases, marginalized artists may play up their connection to places and culturally-rich experiences of these locales, thereby opening up a space for a multiplicitous indigeneity.

In light of the potential for emplacement to reproduce, as well as reframe, indigeneity, I make no a priori decisions regarding the connection between this rhetorical strategy and self-presentation as a G. In other words, although some artists employ emplacement (in tandem with other strategies) to fashion a G persona, this strategy also functions in the service of communicating lived experiences and evoking social categories. If we think of (explicit) emplacement as a term to capture how people express their experiences of place, we may focus *not* on the indexicalities of place terms, but rather on two key social functions of emplacement – communicating a sense of rootedness and possesion of local knowledge. By emplacing themselves, rappers position themselves as socio-geographic insiders, "locals" whose experience of place they authenticate rhetorically. Thus, dissonant meanings evoked by place terms notwithstanding, emplacement itself exhibits coherence across uses, achieving similar

rhetorical ends among artists, across performances; it positions social actors as local insiders, potentiating the construction of (multiplicitous) indigeneities.

Accordingly, I count all instances of explicit emplacement in the analysis. I do not, however, count each instance of metastylistic discourse or self-categorization. Instead, I focus the use of these strategies to cultivate a G persona, in order to examine how the two questions posed above relate (i.e. How is "G-ness" related to indigineity?). Therefore, I only count instances of self-categorization that include the label G and related terms (gangsta, huslta, OG, playa[71]), indices of a fluid, deceivingly-tangible "type." In examples of metastylistic discourse, I quantify social practices including ways-of-participating locally in G taste cultures (as Table 5.3 helps illustrate).

The decision to take a somewhat unidimensional approach to quantifying metastylistic discourse and self-cateorization arises from my goal to understand the the relationship between place, rootedness, and the rhetoric of being a "G." By selectively focusing on G-related practices and labels, while counting all instances of emplacement, I can analyze the relationship between establishing one's indigneity – whatever shape it may take stylistically – and self-portrayal as a G.

Regarding this relationship, I hypothesize that the rhetoric of place and reference to 'hood style correlate in some significant measure. Through the combination of rhetorical and, as the next chapter shows, phonetic practices, established artists make and remake the stylistic boundaries encompassing indigeneity through lyrics and the visual language of videos. These two modes of representation coverge in the "strategic essentialization" (Bucholtz 2003) of rootedness. This process unfolds as artists

[71] These were subjectively chosen based on my experience with Houston hip hop.

rhetorically shape a "regime of representation" (Hall 1997), mediating future self-presentation vis-à-vis rootedenss and its stylistic expression.

Regarding mediation and, by implication, normativity, the preceding discussion merits noting that – as Butler (2004) and Carter (2007) remind us – it is through the recognition of social norms that we exercise some measure of agency. Here I am speaking particularly about the influential, dominant position held by the loose network of popular Houston artists, whose collaborative access and "airtime" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003) help naturalize their stylistic practices. The authoritative conventions that arise through essentializing rhetoric constrain the expression of rootedness, but they also enable alternative expressions. By recognizing normative representations of rootedness, some Houston artists employ parody and "straight" performance, counterposing dominant portrayals of G-related stylistic normativity with alternative framings of rootedness.

Consider, for example, a scenario in which local rappers emphasize their indigineity, while systematically making use of metastylistic discourse and self-categorization differently from popular artists (e.g. §4.1.5-4.1.6). In such cases, artists rhetorically cultivate personae which intertextually provide viable alternatives to the G subjectivity (a subject position which, arguably, dominates the aesthetics of popular Houston hip hop). By comparing rates of emplacement with rates of references to G-related social practices and labels, we may determine if asymmetries arise in the use of emplacement versus tactics for self-portrayal as a G. In this chapter, I ask whether up-and-coming artists interweave indigineity with the G persona, or some culturally-viable alternative(s).

Opposing norms regarding the stylistic terms of rootedness speak to the contention between established and alternative hip hop networks. For example, in H.I.S.D.'s song "The City," local rapper Equality touches on this contention, the existence of multiple cultural currents, the semiotic practices they share, and the potential for a spatialized muliplicity/polyphony:

Excerpt 6.1: Polyphony and EQ's Multi-Lane Metaphor

1 "yall boys ain't that typical mayne,"
2 same road, we just tippin' from a different lane,
3 beautiful side of an ugly game,
4 H-tahn, what a lovely twang,
5 What it do, now the whole world lovin' our slang...

Again, in this passage we see the use of constructed dialogue, a rhetorical strategy familiar from the Introduction. This dialogue involves an unknown – arguably fictive – voice of someone who tells EQ that his group, H.I.S.D., "ain't that typical mayne." In this declarartion, EQ ventiroquilically manifests local knowledge by using a local discourse marker and term of salutation, "mayne" (Doing so evokes an authoritative voice – namely, that of the G. EQ embeds this term in the turn of his fictive interlocutor, counterposing the cultural images evoked by "mayne" with something alternative, a style not "typical" in regard to popular Houston rap music.

EQ continues, rhetorically distinguishing cultural currents in the next line, where he employs metastylistic discourse – referring to the salient car-cultural practice "tippin'" – to compose a metaphor that opens a space for multiplicity. Consider the rhetoric in line 2: "same road, we just tipppin' from a different lane." What if the multi-lane road is the source domain, and the target domain is (a multifaceted) rootedness in Houston rap music? And, what if "tippin' from a different lane" metaphorically stands for participating in a different current in the local hip hop scene?

If so, the questions I pose suggest that MCs – including Equality – employ rhetorical strategies to reject the singularizing rhetoric of local rap music, opting for a multiplicitious indigineity. For example, in Excerpt 6.1, Equality emphasizes social similarity, the "same road" of hip hop cultural production in Houston. However, the artist subtly separates himself and his group from other popular currents via the car-culture metaphor, claiming his group rides on the "same road" but in "a different lane." Here the artists uses the metaphor as an analogue to the multiplicitous, spatialized currents in Houston, each vying for equity or, in some cases, exclusivity when it comes to representation of Houston (both locally and to outsiders).

Returning to the two questions I posed at the beginning of this section, I intend to combine quantitative and qualitative methods in order to gain insights into schematic, structurally-patterned[72] of the young people who keep Houston hip hop alive. I seek to bring to light a struggle among artists for the power to represent – to empower themselves by portraying their (life)styles positively, through the widely-circulated medium of rap music. In asking these questions, I also bring to light the socially-

[72] In the sense of Giddens (1984)...

constructed nature of indigineity in the Houston scene, taking popular local style as a point of departure for the study.

Specifically, of the three rhetorical tactics for self-presentation I analyze in this chapter, I propose to limit two specific rhetorical strategies, self-categorzation and metastylistic discourse, to only those instances involved in cultivating a G persona – as my interests lie in exploring how differential orientations to this subject position – the iconic G or "thug" figure – appear in rhetorical and phonetic asymmetries among the artists. Furthermore, artists may use (overt) emplacement – the third rhetorical strategy – regardless of whether they portray themselves as Gs, or a range of other cultural possibilities.

For instance, some artists (including Damien and Fat Tony) draw little (if at all) on the rhetoric of place to cultivate lyrically personae. In these cases, I qualitatively examine (co)textual dissimilarities beween artists who significantly differ (quantitatively) in their rhetorical use of place.[73] By comparing these dissimilarities, the data throw light on the role place plays in self-presentation, particularly in the cases where artists draw little, if any, on rootedness in voicing their personae. These artists lyrically craft masculinities and authenticities alternative to that of the G, a situation I discuss at length later in this chapter and in the Conclusion, in §8.3.3.

6.5 Data and Methods

For the analysis in the following section, I draw on a small corpus of hip hop albums and "demos" gathered during the course of my fieldwork. These recordings represent the work of twelve local hip hop artists (or personages, as we shall see); three label-signed,

[73] In the limited way it is examined here.

well-known artists, and ten lesser-known artists, voices outside the institutionalized mainstream of Houston hip hop. The three established artists I selected for the study - Slim Thug, Lil Keke, and Paul Wall – were chosen based on my take on their popularity in the local scene, as well as their local and national commercial succes. Regulars at the station often talk about these artists (positively and negatively), citing their lyrics and evaluating their skills. Accordingly, I consider and refer to these established artists as social icons, in the sense of Eckert (2000, 2004) and scholars who make use of this construct (see especially the introduction to this Chapter).

In choosing to include these iconic artists in the analysis, I propose that they have access to the cultural means of production (cf. Hebdige 1978), that is, their voices "get heard" by means of institutions that circulate music through commercial points of distribution. It is in this way that Slim Thug, Lil Keke, and Paul Wall act as social icons, vetted institutionally, distributed internationally, and consequently, impactfully "heard." In the hierarcy of the culture industry that is Houston hip hop, these artists stand tall, garner attention (at the station, in the local and (inter)national press, etc.), and therefore find themselves in a position to set trends, to lay down intertextual series related to authenticity and indigeneity.

These series include instances of speech – or some part of them – which function as my units of analysis. As described earlier, in this Chapter and in Chapter 4, social actors refer to G-related social practices, which in turn index characterlogical qualities associated with credentializing experience, including the lived experience of place. As already noted, facets of such experience in the case of the G include lexical and phrasal material referring to car culture, fashion, and drug culture, as well as rhetoric which

reifies the subjects or agents associated with deployment of these cultural acts (i.e. self-categorization).

In this Chapter, I isolate references to these three cultural domains (cars, drugs, self-labeling) by listening to local hip hop recordings and noting whenever an artist makes use of lexical or phrasal material – small texts – indexing lived experience of place (e.g. that of the G). Furthermore, I identify the artists' overt textual orientations to place through lyrics. So, terms and expressions referring to place in songs are quantified, and a ratio is calculated by divding the total number of these spatialized references by the total "line count" in an artists recordings.

That is, in order to make the data comparable, I identify lexical items tied either to emplacement or the cultivation of a G persona (through the rhetorical strategies described above), counting the total instances of these lexemes and phrases and then dividing them by the total lines in the artist's body of work. These lines are one-half a couplet, as reflected by my numbering of lines in the tables above. For each artist then, I count the total lines they rap per corpus (per artist). Doing so makes possible the calculation of a ratio, dividing distinct uses of a rhetorical strategy (per line) by the total lines in the music I gathered from each artist.

I call this measure the tactic-to-line ratio (hereafter TTLr), the analysis of which provides insights into how artists exercise mediated agency by opting to make relatively-frequent or infrequent use of the three rhetorical tactics described above. Calculating the TTLr makes possible the identification of combinatorial patterns in the usage of spatialized and G-related rhetorical practices, patterns key to determining, first, if the items analyzed truly hang together in a statistical sense. To this end, I employ ITEM

ANALYSIS, a statistical measure often used in psychometrics to determine the internal coherence of patterns in surveys and other questionnaire instruments. As the present study intends to uncover trends in the combinatorial use of each rhetorical tactic, specifically with an eye to examining the relationship between Cases 1-3, I employ item analysis to determine the extent to which trends across artists' rhetorical positioning exhibit interrelated behavior (i.e. statistically-significant patterning).

6.5.1 Construct Validity and Item Analysis

As Colton and Covert (2007) note, "the basic process of conducting item analysis is to demonstrate a relationship between individual items, such as item 1 and item 2, then item 1 and item 3, and so on, until all possible pairings are exhausted." Researchers have employed this correlation-based approach to assess the reliability with which various instruments, including questionnaires and customer-satisfaction surveys, measure some coherent construct, ability, or (latent) trait (Lord 1980, Rasch 1960, Zeidner 1998), such as disgust. Central here is how one conceptualizes and measures the construct – such as disgust – under study.

Item analysis works well in cases where each item or variable meaningfully relates to or captures some dimension of a coherent construct. That is, if we were to develop an instrument to measure professor effectiveness, ideally, the questions designed would each attempt to meaningfully capture coherent dimensions of the social construct. Designing or identifying such items requires first that we consider the coherence, relevance, and scope of the construct, the exact ability, characteristic, or attitude under study. If the construct is too general or vaguely-conceptualized, it will prove more

difficult to develop or identify items (e.g. questions/variables) that each reveal something about the population's orientation to the proposed construct.

So, for item analysis to prove a good fit for a particular project, analysts must first consider how best to conceptualize and describe this construct. In the present work, I seek to examine and describe the complex social relation of "G-ness," partially gauging an artist's orientation (positive or negative) to the G persona. I chose this construct based on the centrality of the G subjectivity in the field of local hip hop cultural production, a social arrangement discussed earlier and throughout this work. Regarding the "items" used in my analysis, I return to my argument that cultivating a G persona involves the recurrent use of stylistic/rhetorical practices which index related dimensions of a lived or imagined experience of place, reified through the G label. These practices, I argue, meaningfully cohere or "hang together" (to use Coupland's (2007) phrasing) in the lyrical articulation of a durable but fluid subjectivity, rhetorically dominating Houston's hip hop landscape.

To evaluate this hypothesis in the present case then, I employ item analysis to explore the interrelatedness of emplacement, reference to rhetorically-naturalized social practices, and self-identification as a G or related subject position. Though they only give partial shape to the dominat social relation in question, I argue that, by exploring how these rhetorical strategies articulate through item analysis, we may ascertain a measure of coherence among items, as well as an indication of construct validity. This measure derives from item analysis itself, specifically, from the value known as Cronbach's alpha (or simply α). Regarding scale, this score ranges from 0 to1, with scores closer to 1 (often >0.7 or >0.9) generally regarded as significant.

Thus, item analysis provides us with statistical methods for testing hypotheses regarding the coherence of items (e.g. stylistic practices) in use, across artists' performances. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha gives us an idea of how well the items selected relate to the ethnographically-informed construct of G-ness. In these ways, item analysis sheds light on issues central to current linguistically-oriented approaches to style, including usage-based cohesion among trans-modal signifying practices. For our purposes, this approach provides exploratory measures of correlation that supplement our qualitative findings and inform their interpretation. Specifically, α serves as one line of convergent findings relevant to understanding structured variation in the use of intertextual resources for subject formation.

6.5.2 Cluster Analysis and Rhetorical Asymmetries

Another line of findings comes from the use of cluster analysis to explore how rappers in the study group together according to the rates at which they employ each rhetorical strategy described above. As mentioned, I calculate ratio values by dividing the total number of lines in an artist's body of work by the number of lines in which each rhetorical tactic is used, yielding a TTLr for each artist in the sample. It is this set of values that serves as input for calculation of a distance measure and a similarity level, central to the hierarchical process of placing artists into groups based on similarity along the dimensions of the distance measure.

For the current project, I chose the squared Pearson distance option in Minitab (ref), one of the software suites used for the analyses. As the makers of this software note, Pearson distance is "a square root of the sum of square distances divided by

variances. This distance gives a standardized measure of distance." In a number of amalagamation steps, the software calculates distance and similarity levels among clusters, based on the Pearson algorithm and Ward linkage methods, reducing the numbers of groups from N (=total items) until there is only one cluster left. Minitab then produces output such as Table 6.4 below:

Table 6.4: Example of Amalgamation Steps

Squared Pearson Distance, Ward Linkage – Amalgamation steps						
Step	Number of Clusters	Similarity Level	Distance Level	Clusters Joined	New Cluster	# of obs. In new Cluster
1	11	96.447	0.13271	6 9	6	2
2	10	93.784	0.23217	2 5	3	2
3	9	90.431	0.35744	1 3	1	3
4	8	88.972	0.41192	11 10	10	2
5	7	84.384	0.58329	1 2	1	4
6	6	79.624	0.76109	6 10	6	4
7	5	73.381	0.99429	4 12	4	2
8	4	66.170	1.26364	6 8	6	5
9	3	51.978	1.79376	4 7	4	3
10	2	14.350	3.19923	4 6	4	8
11	1	-155.254	9.53435	1 4	1	12

This table comes from clustering based on the phonetic variables, described in the next chapter. As we see in this iterative process, there is a sharp drop-off in similiarity level between steps 9 and 10. Leading up to this iteration of the amalgamation process, similarity across steps 1 through 9 decreases only slightly (>3 SL <15), whereas steps 10 and 11 differ by about 30 degrees of similarity, roughly double that of the previous step. I compare such sharp drops in similarity to the number of clusters at the step preceding the

drop (in this case, three clusters in step 9), in order to determine a working – and potentially final – data partition (i.e. set of groupings). Furthermore, the parameter "similarity level" serves as an alternative basis for manually determining the final cluster partition. In these ways, cluster analysis serves as an exploratory method for ascertaining data-driven groups, which I use later, in the phonetic analysis, as a predictor in linear regression.

6.6 Visualizing Patterns in the Data

To begin the analysis, I listened to each artist's album or demo and transcribed lines containing any of the three rhetorical strategies under study. Next, I listened once more to each album, counting the total number of lines (i.e. half-couplets) rapped. I present the breakdown of place stancetaking and G-related rhetorical strategies, including the total lines per album, in Table 6.5 below. To identify the artists I have worked with, I leave their entries below in plain white, while highlighting in gray the three established artists at the bottom.

Table 6.5: Raw Rhetorical Data Counts

		(G-Related Metastylistic Discourse)			*(As a G-related Category)*	
Artist	Place	Fashion	Drug Culture	Car Culture	Self-Categorization	Total Lines Per Album
Damien	1	0	0	0	0	458
Fat Tony	1	0	3	0	0	200
LdaVoice	11	1	1	2	0	188
Savvi	20	0	2	1	0	203
JB	23	2	15	5	3	286
Kritikal	42	3	22	6	1	628
A Dub	13	8	5	8	7	118
Zeak	11	2	16	33	4	164
Big Weed	30	13	28	21	1	314

Lil Keke	40	13	14	96	12	490
Paul Wall	46	25	35	88	15	445
Slim Thug	28	27	11	37	12	553

As you can see, the number of total lines per album ranges from 628 (Kritikal) at the high end, to 118 (A Dub) at the low end. This variation arises for several reasons. For example, some artists, such as A Dub, rap with a number of other artists on an album, and do not contribute to particular songs. Additionally, some artists provided me with short demos, collections of only a few songs (usually six), yielding fewer lines to count and analyze.

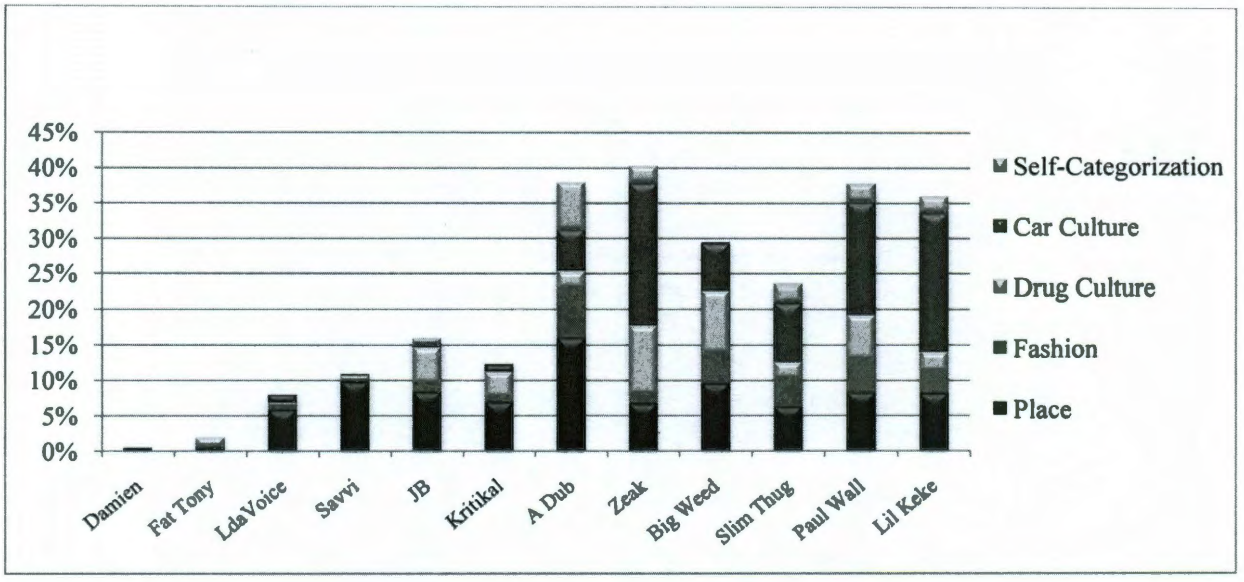
To create comparability, I divided the number of strategies used by an artist, by the total lines rapped on his album or demo, yielding the TTLr (tactic-to-line ratio). Calculating this value for each artist makes it possible to compare *rates* of usage across artists, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 6.6: Tactic-to-Line Ratios for each Artist

		(G-Related Metastylistic Discourse)			*(As a G-related Category)*
Artist	Place	Fashion	Drug Culture	Car Culture	Self-Categorization
Damien	.004	.002	.000	.000	.000
Fat Tony	.005	.000	.015	.000	.000
LdaVoice	.059	.005	.005	.011	.000
Savvi	.098	.000	.009	.002	.000
JB	.084	.010	.052	.003	.010
Kritikal	.070	.005	.037	.010	.002
A Dub	.160	.068	.025	.059	.068
Zeak	.068	.012	.098	.201	.025
Big Weed	.096	.041	.089	.067	.003
Lil Keke	.082	.029	.029	.196	.024
Paul Wall	.083	.045	.064	.159	.027
Slim Thug	.063	.038	.025	.083	.027

Again, I have highlighted in gray the three established artists at the bottom, but I have also lightly highlighted five TTLr values approaching or exceeding 10%. That is, for instance, in the case of A Dub, we see that he raps about place in 16% of the lines on his album. In tabular format, however, sizable minorities such as this value, and their cumulative patterns and effects, do not leap out at the analyst – especially as we are dealing with relatively small ratios. To better illustrate, then, what portions of each artist's musical contribution contain the rhetorical strategies under study, I reformat and present the findings in a stacked-column chart below.

Chart 6.1: Use of Rhetorical Strategies in Stacked-Column Format



Here, we can visualize A Dub's relatively high rate of emplacement, topping out just over the 15% line (the first black block in his "stack"). Moreover, these stacked columns visually make detectable potential trends across artists and their use of rhetorical strategies. For instance, regarding the combined use of each strategy, we can identify a

sharp asymmetry, splitting the chart down the middle, between Kritikal and A Dub. Artists to the right of this split not only make relatively-proportional use of each rhetorical strategy; they also they exhibit particularly high usage of some strategies, compared with artists to the left of the split. A Dub's use of emplacement serves as a case in point, as does Zeak's use of car-related metastylistic discourse (>20% of total lines rapped), highlighted in Table 6.5.

As noted, the chart suggests some measure of proprotional coherence in the use of each rhetorical strategy by artists to the right of the split (including the three established local artists). By contrast, looking at the artists to the left of our rhetorical divide, we do not observe similar patterning for the use of each strategy. For example, self-categorization as a G and car-related metastylistic discourse hardly register on the chart, with low-to-zero values for each artist. However, small potential trends exist to the left of the divide as well.

Consider the use of emplacement by Ldavoice, Savvi, JB, and Kritikal. Their usage rates, ranging roughly from 6% to 8%, appear comparable to the rates of usage observed for artists to the right of the split (save for A Dub). In other words, rates of emplacement across the total sample appear relatively constant, except in the cases of Damien and Fat Tony (<.005 each). Impressionistically, it would seem that these two artists group together according to their equally low overall tactic-to-line ratios. Along the same lines, it appears that Ldavoice, Savvi, JB, and Kritikal use emplacement at rates comparable with established artists. However, neither Savvi nor LdaVoice make much use of the other rhetorical strategies, producing smaller stacked columns. By contrast, as

the the columnar data suggest, JB and Kritikal make some use of G-fashion and drug-related metastylistic discourse.

Key here is that four artists from the sample make use of emplacement as frequently, on the whole, as our baseline, established artists – Slim Thug, Paul Wall, and Lil Keke. We thus see a potential trend in the use of emplacement across artists, in which established artists, as well as A Dub, Zeak, and Big Weed, combine emplacement with each other rhetorical strategy in constructing on-mic personae. By contrast, our four other rhetorically-rooted artists – LdaVoice, Savvi, JB, and Kritikal – use emplacement at rates comparable with Lil Keke, but do not combine their construction of rootedness with car culture. Furthermore, within this group of artists, LdaVoice and Savvi form a sub-group, whose low rates of drug-related metastylistic discourse differentiates them from JB and Kritikal.

These preliminary observations fit well with arguments I have made throughout the dissertation about the contested nature of indigineity. Specifically, we see that, for all but two artists, rates of emplacement appear somewhat proportional, ranging from 6%-16% of total lines rapped for ten of the twelve artists. However, asymmetries in the use of the other rhetorical strategies make clear that, for a portion of up-and-coming artists, car culture, popular fashion, and drug culture play little to no role in their rhetorical construction of rootedness. That is, artists who overtly portray their rootedness differ – with some regularity – in their interpolation of indigeneity with car culture, G-related fashion, and (in some cases) drug culture.

This point brings us to perhaps the most striking pattern of all in the chart, namely, one that involves portraying oneself overtly as a G while also referring to

cultural domains herein hypothesized to give the G figure semiotic substance. As the data show, artists who portray themselves as Gs *even only once* exhibit some use of the other analytically-delimited rhetorical strategies. This observation suggests that emplacement, as well as referring to drug culture, car culture, and a narrow range of sartorial practices, function in tandem with explicit depictions of oneself as a G. In other words, I argue that the cultural domains in Chart 6.1 *do* indeed "hang together;" that combinatorial references to place, car culture, drug culture, and popular fashion trends *do* function in the service of rhetorically cultivating a "gangsta," or "thug," or "G" persona.

In the following sections, I utilize item analyis to explore whether and to what degree the cultural domains represented in Chart 6.1 hang together, in statistical terms. I rely on Cronbach's alpha to gauge the extent to which trends in the data validate my (admittedly-limited) model of G-ness, centering around emplacement, self-identification, and the indexical potentials of practices rooted in local car and drug cultures – as well as popular fashion.

Regarding the limitations of this model, I want to point out that references to only five cultural domains account for roughly 25%-40% of total lines rapped by half the artists in my sample. These figures speak to the non-trivial role of reference in rhetoric – references to the the cultural domains linked to cultivating a G persona. However, as the other patterns in the chart suggest, artists including LdaVoice and Savvi communicate their experience of place, while avoiding practices linked to dominant framings of the G figure. In these cases, the rhetorical strategies and cultural domains evokative of G-ness form much smaller composite stacks, ranging roughly from from <1% to 15% of total lines rapped. Later in the chapter, I discuss what this disparity means in terms of personae

management and the importance of rootedness in currents of local hip hop *outside* of the established mainstream.

Specifically, I examine how artists contributing to these currents reflect on and critique hip hop, in part through narratives exploring their experiences becoming rappers. As I suggest below, these artists strongly emphasize the expressive function of hip hop, managing impressions by playing up lyrical prowess and attacking untalented straw-man rappers. Other differences between established MCs and these dissenting artists include using rap music as a platform for social critique, on-mic introspection, and persona management through imagined, actual, and allegorical narrative.

Before discussing how rhetoric mediates social relations, I first return to the issue of construct coherence/validation as it relates to the item analysis of rhetorical variation in my sample. If the five cultural domains examined in Chart 6.1 do function in tandem to evoke what I have termed G-ness, we should expect a relatively-high value for Cronbach's alpha (pre-chosen threshold of ~0.7). As described earlier, this value is calculated based on a Pearson-correlation matrix that estimates how well items (rhetorical strategies) "hang together." That is, if the items exhibit a reasonably proportional distribution (relative to one another) across speakers, the analysis will return a high value for alpha. It is in this way that item analysis provides convergent, quantitative evidence that the items comprising my model in some way contribute to the cultivation of a socially-shared construct, discursively-framed experiences reified by labels such as G, "thug," and "gangsta."

6.6.1 Item Analysis

The ratio data and artist names found in Table 6.5 serve as input (values and labels) for the item analysis. For G-related metastylistic discourse, I chose not to take the sum of "Fashion," "Drug Culture," and "Car Culture," opting instead to analyze each cultural domain independently of the other. This decision better suits my aims and analysis, as it yields five related items to compare in the correlation matrix. Separating out the three G-related components of metastylistic discourse also enables us to evaluate how well each component fits the model – that is, how well referring to drug culture, car culture, and popular fashion interrelate and covary with rates of emplacement and self-portrayal as a G.

Below, in Table 6.6, I present the results of the item analysis. Means and standard deviations appear first, then Chronbach's alpha. Omitted item statistics follow, displaying an adjusted overall Chronbach's alpha reflecting the omission of a given item before recalculating α (for each item). As you will see, I have highlighted the row in which "Car Culture" is omitted; I remark on this entry below, following a brief discussion of the results.

Table 6.7: Item Analysis of Rhetorical Variation

Item Analysis and Total Statistics – Rhetorical Variation					
Variable	**Total Count**	**Mean**	**StDev**		
Place	12	0.0726	0.04129		
Fashion	12	0.02128	0.02233		
Drug Culture	12	0.03732	0.03211		
Car Culture	12	0.06588	0.0781		

Self-Categorization	12	0.01553	0.02024		
Total	12	0.21262	0.14765		

Chronbach's Alpha = 0.6913
(approaching significance at the pre-chosen threshold of 0.7)

Omitted Item Statistics

Omitted Variable	Adj. Total Mean	Adj. Total StDev	Item-Adj Total Corr	Squared Multiple Corr	Cronbach's Alpha
Place	0.14	0.1241	0.4592	0.5859	0.6369
Fashion	0.1913	0.1314	0.6958	0.7465	0.6198
Drug Culture	0.1753	0.1283	0.5235	0.4838	0.6274
Car Culture	0.1467	0.0907	0.5275	0.5508	**0.7427**
Self-Categorization	0.1971	0.1334	0.6656	0.7808	0.6339

As the table shows, Chronbach's alpha approaches significance in the item analysis, coming in at .69, just below our pre-chosen α of 0.7. What this figure tells us is that, on the whole, it is highly-unlikely that the patterns identified visually in Chart 6.1 happen by chance. That is, there is a reasonably-significant statistical basis for claiming that the rhetorical strategies and G-related cultural domains under study indeed hang together. Furthermore, because α approaches significance at 0.69, we may conclude that the five items in our analysis interrelate in their cumulative potential to evoke the social construct of G-ness.

Nevertheless, one of the five items in the analysis somewhat skews α, as we see from the omitted item statistics in the chart. Specifically, if the item "Car Culture" – highlighted in the table – is omitted, α rises to .74, clearly above the chosen threshold of

significance. This finding points to a trend visually detectable in Chart 6.1, namely, that referring to car culture varies among artists who portray themselves as Gs. For example, while JB and Kritikal self-identify as Gs, they make only sparse use of car culture in lyrically connecting themselves to lived experience of Houston's streets.

This finding suggests that car culture may be a contested domain in "street-oriented" rap music, of varying relevance/utility to MCs cultivating a G persona. That is to say, at least in my sample, car culture does not factor into some formulations of the G subjectivity. Furthermore, we can speculate that evoking car culure – which is tied to a narrow, classed conception of rootedness – metonymically brings into focus a lived experience of place at odds with different orientations to and rhetorical portrayals of rootedness. Thus, while the cultural domains I selected appear to measure the same construct, we note that car culture potentially distinguishes between individuals who value differently participation in local car culture.

This observation falls in line with speculative suggestions for gouping artists, proposed earlier in the chapter. Returning to this topic, I have noted that a major divide is visually discernible in the data, separating artists roughly into two groups: Those who appear to follow precedents set by established artists, and those who do not. As I noted earlier, within this second group, we see potential subgroupings, in which JB and Kritikal pattern similarly in their rates of reference to the cultural domains under study. By contrast, Damien and Fat Tony appear to trend together, hardly registering rhetorically in my model of G-ness. To test these observations empirically, I turn now to a cluster analysis of the artists, based on rhetorical variation.

6.6.2 Rhetorical Variation and Clustering

For the cluster analysis, I chose the "Cluster Observations" option in Minitab and set the similarity level to 90%, so that the final partition would reflect a reasonably-high degree of likeness among group members. As Table 6.8 shows below, the agglomerative clustering process approaches the threshold value in step six, at which time six clusters are identified. These six groups comprise artists who, along the dimension of rhetorical variation, exhibit congruous rates of usage at a similarity level >90 (using Pearson-squared distance). I have highlighted the step at which the desired similarity level is reached.

Table 6.8: Cluster Analysis in Minitab – Amalgamation Steps

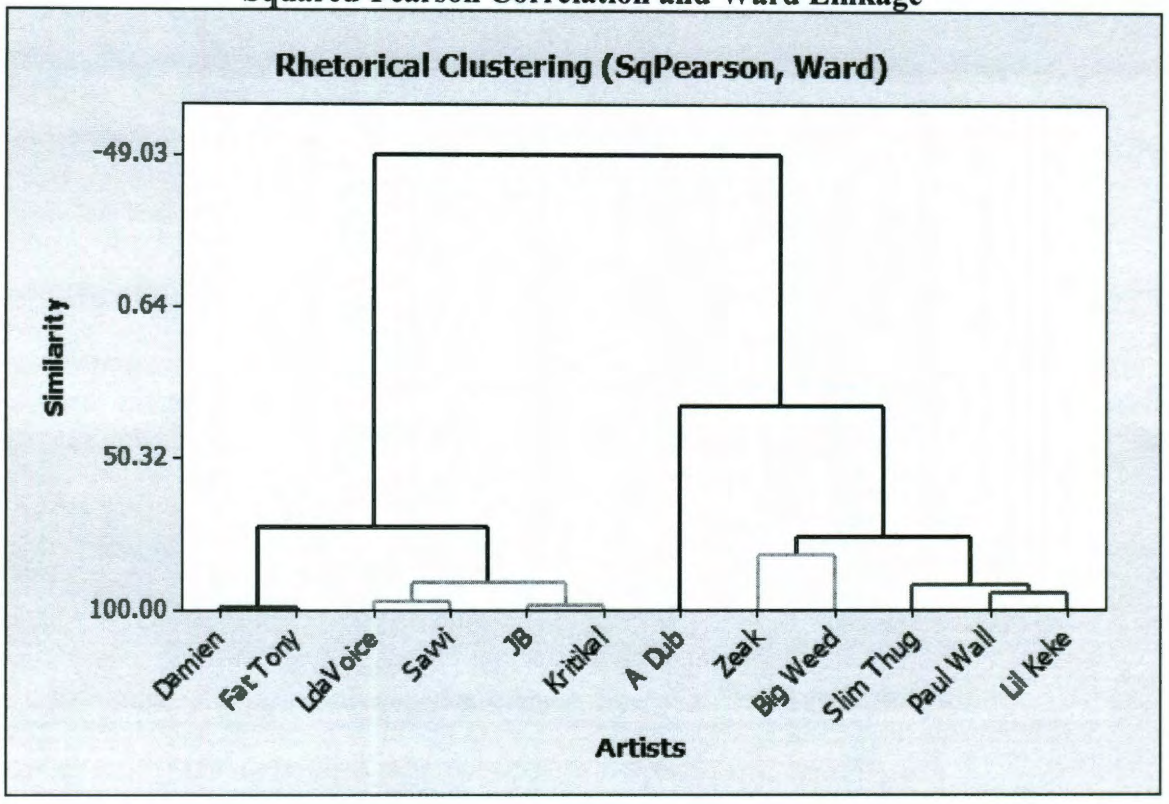
Cluster Analysis of Rhetorical Variation

Squared Pearson Distance, Ward Linkage
Amalgamation Steps

Step	Number of Clusters	Similarity Level	Distance Level	Clusters Joined	New Cluster	# of obs. In new Cluster
1	11	99.3605	0.2268	1 2	1	2
2	10	98.3565	0.583	5 6	5	2
3	9	97.1972	0.9942	3 4	3	2
4	8	94.5256	1.9418	11 12	11	2
5	7	91.9514	2.8549	10 11	10	3
6	6	91.3875	3.0549	3 5	3	4
7	5	82.2542	6.2945	8 9	8	2
8	4	76.4896	8.3392	8 10	8	5
9	3	73.499	9.4	1 3	1	6
10	2	33.8948	23.4478	7 8	7	6
11	1	-49.0345	52.8631	1 7	1	12

As Table 6.8 shows, the similarity value drops during clustering below our threshold of >90 in step seven. Accordingly, I return to step six, for a final partition with a high, pre-determined similarity level. The rhetorical groupings are visually discernible in the dendrogram displayed below, in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Rhetorical Clustering using Squared-Pearson Correlation and Ward Linkage



The dendrogram clearly confirms some speculation above regarding how artists pattern or group together, according to the rates at which they employ the rhetorical strategies under study. For instance, Damien and Fat Tony – whose composite columns appear relatively small in Chart 6.1 – group together, as do LdaVoice and Savvi, artists who emplace themselves at rates comparable to established MCs, but who do not overtly identify as Gs.

Moving on to the right, we observe that JB and Kritkal group together, the two Gs whose tactic-to-line ratios for car culture fall well below those of the established artists and other MCs to the right of the divide in Chart 6.1.Regarding this division, we see it mirrored in the structure of the dendrogram. The left side forms one cluster at a similarity level of >50, while artists to the right fall into a more variegated cluster, whose similiarity level reaches below 50. (This lower level of similiarity involves variation among the artists in referring to car culture, discussed earlier.)

It is worth noting here that the three established artists cluster together rhetorically, at a similarity level of >90. Moving leftwards, we see that Zeak and Big Weed form a somewhat-weaker cluster (<90 x >80 similiarity), and A-Dub stands by himself as our only one-artist cluster. This distinction stems from Dub's high rates of G self-portrayal and emplacement – roughly double that of other artists to the right of the rhetorical divide (including the established artists).

We can draw several key insights from the results of the cluster analysis. First, A-Dub, Zeak, and Big Weed cluster rhetorically with the established artists in the study. If we return to the argument made earlier in the dissertation, that phonetic variation is inextricably tied to rhetorical variation intertextually, then the pattern we see regarding which artists cluster with the established artists could prove useful in understanding and describing the results of phonetic clustering in the Chapter Seven.

Second, we note that JB and Kritikal group together as a subcluster, linked to what I shall refer to as Group Two (described in detail below): LdaVoice and Savvi. This cluster complements my anlalytic description of currents in Houston hip hop from Chapter Four. There, I proposed that Ldavoice and Savvi – both members of local group

H.I.S.D. – participate in a current of Houston rap culture we might call "post-underground hip hop." What separates these artists from MCs who, in the past, have rejected "mainstream" rap – while identifying as "underground" – also unites them with self-proclaimed Gs, who participate in what was termed "another underground" in Houston hip hop (e.g. JB and Kritikal).

I descibed this current as comprising "street-conscious" (Alim 2002) artists who reject trendy, stereotypic formulations of rootedness in popular Houston rap music. Central here is that artists in both currents overlap in their rhetorical use of emplacement, detectable visually even from Chart 6.1. It is along this cultural dimension, namely, orientation to and representation of place and (spatialized) taste cultures, that artists like Savvi and Kritikal find key common rhetorical ground: These artists not only openly affirm their connection to the streets, but also reject singularizing lyrical portrayals of localness, popularized by established artists.

I argue that these proposals find empirical support in the cluster analysis. Specifically, the analysis provides convergent, visually-inspectable evidence that some artists who emplace themselves at rates comparable with established MCs do not make the same use of rhetorical strategies to evoke the popular G figure, to which established artists orient. I propose that shared understandings of the ways in which popular style interpolates with rootedness undergirds these rhetorical asymetries. That is, artists not only orient to prior texts and precedents, they make differential use of them to construct rooted personae, indigeneous voices that speak of and from experiences of place that do not conform to the narrowly-portrayed rootedness of the G-figure in popular rap.

This observation brings me to a third insight revealed by the cluster analysis. Specifically, all but two artists in the sample overtly emplace themselves, but they make systematically-differential use of G-related rhetorical strategies. This pattern in the cluster analysis suggest that the rhetorical strategies are valued differently by artists aiming to cultivate images of localness, distinct images. To draw a concrete example from my research, the group H.I.S.D – whose artists cluster together in the rhetorical analysis – openly rejects stereotypes of Houston (Texas) in their song "Cowboys."

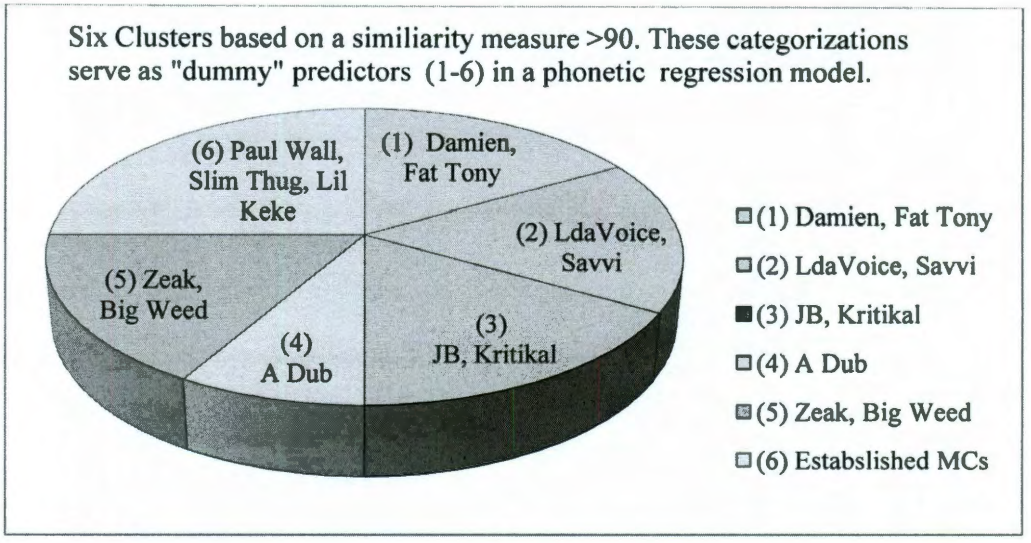
Fourth and finally, through the cluster analysis, we gain insights into the availability of social norms by comparing the places in our dendrogram where Damien and his parodic, alter-ego, Big Weed, fall in the partition. As Figure 6.1 clearly shows, Damien and Fat Tony group together at a similarity level of >99, reflecting their comparably-infrequent use of G-related rhetorical strategies. These artists clearly fall to the left of our rhetorical divide, whereas Big Weed's cluster is linked with the established artists at a similiarity level >75.

Since Damien and Big Weed are products of the same person, these results speak to the social availability of rhetorical tactics such as G-related metastylistic discourse. Rapping as Damien – major contributor to one of Houston's "undergrounds" – the artist hardly registers on the working model of G-ness presented in Chart 6.1 As Big Weed, the artist clearly exhibits trends similar to those of established artists. In the least, what this fact tells us is that hip hop artists are not only aware of dominant stylistic norms, but also, that they are capable of approximating such norms to critique their naturalness and the desirability of being "street," or a G. As I argued in Chapter Five, by comparing parodic

and non-parodic personae produced by the same person, we throw into relief norms shared in dissonance.

In summary, the cluster analysis corroborates some initial speculation, while also providing a tool for grouping artists based not on a priori categories, but rather, based on their use of language toward social ends (cf. the use of cluster analysis by LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985). As I make clear in this section, clusters produced by the analysis reflect different takes both on rootedness and G-ness. In the next chapter, I use these groups – displayed in Figure 6.2 – in regression analysis to establish and examine relationships between rhetorical self-presentation and phonetic variation.

Figure 6.2: Rhetorical Clusters for Regression Analysis



Before moving on to a comparison of rhetorical and phonetic variation, I first address a gap in my analysis, centering around what it is that artists, including Damien and Fat Tony, rap about. As mentioned earlier, these artists rarely if ever use the rhetorical strategies on which my analysis is based, strategies linked with cultivating a G self-

image. If these artists seldom rap about where they are from, what they wear, what they drive, what they drink or smoke, or how "gangsta" they are, then what are they doing differently?

6.6.3 Understanding the Asymmetries: Some Social Functions of Hip Hop

Earlier in the chapter, I proposed to limit all but one of the rhetorical strategies under study to instances ovetly linked with self-portrayal as a G. As we saw in Chart 6.1, for half the artists in my sample, use of these strategies – as well as emplacement – account for approximately 25% to 40% of total lines rapped. These figures speak to the non-trivial role played overall by G-related rhetorical practices in "personae mangagement" (Coupland 2001), a central social function of hip hop discourse. Artists such as Zeak and A Dub spend a fair amount of time rapping about concrete, spatially-anchored social practices that metonymically put them in "the streets," where these practices unfold. More specifically, social practices such as "sippin drank" and "ridin' chrome" put an artists in the streets as a G.

This point is crucial. Artists seeking to mangage impressions of themselves as Gs (unsurprisingly) rap about practices and places associated directly – through labeling – and indirectly with the G figure. This characterological figure evokes a life lived in "the streets" of 'hoods known for being tough and producing tough people. Thus, some artists leverage the rhetorical potentials of G-related metastylistic discourse and emplacement to manage impressions of themselves as tough, rooted youth.

By contrast, artists including Damien and Fat Tony seldom appeal to locales in order to manage their personae. Nor do they make frequent mention of G-related social

practices and labels. With the preceding discussion in mind, I argue that what separates Fat Tony and Damien from the established artists is, ultimately, their (lack of an obvious) commitment to, and rhetorical self-portrayal as, a G (or a thug, or a gangsta) – a street-oriented subject who participates in a taste culture comprising people who share a belief in "grindin' before shinin'" (discussed below). By contrast, neither Damien nor Fat Tony present themselves as Gs. Rather, they often rap about being young hip hop artists trying to succeed in an industry enamored with "tales from the 'hood."

Instead of rhetorically making use of the G subject position, Damien and Fat Tony, as well as H.I.S.D., voice more working/middle-class personae who wrestle with issues of identity, authenticity, class, and simply "making it" as rappers in Houston. For these artists, the struggle of succeeding in hip hop resonates strongly in their lyrics. To illustrate, consider the following passage from Damien's song "Unemployed:"

Excerpt 6.2: Damien (Legendary KO) "Unemployed"

(chorus)

We some unemployed niggas,
Blue collar workin' MCs
Stay on your grind, on the hustle
Strive over struggle always mind over muscle

(verse)

You know that bein broke will throw it all in perspective
When you screenin them phone calls from bill collectors
Lookin' at my bank statement I can only laugh
All it's sayin' is [xx] and overdraft,
I quit a job two times to hit the road twice
I done work for six months ain't nothin nice
Gotta fold a piece of bread just to make a sandwich
Two weeks away from moving back in with my parents
No luck with carrer builder or hotjobs,
I'm working harder than other niggas that got jobs
Overlooked for others, though I'm a lot smarter,
Just makes me wanna pick this mic up and rock harder

Here, Damien raps about his situation as a hip hop artist trying to "get by," balancing a nine-to-five with his rap career. When the situation calls for it, for instance, he makes sacrifices for his rap career by quitting his day-job in order to go on tour (line 9 "I quit a job two times to hit the road twice"). In the passage, Damien describes his circumstances as a struggling artist in concrete terms: He is someone willing to put up with bill collectors, low cash flow, job uncertainty, and a non-meritocratic path to success in both the "business world" and the hip hop industry, all to succeed as an MC.

In the passage, Damien does a great deal to manage impressions of himself, though he does not describe himself lyrically as "gettin' money in the streets," "sittin' on chrome," or "sippin' barre." These G-related practices do not play a role in Damien's life. Instead, he is on a different kind of "grind" or hustle (line 3), one that requires "mind over muscle" (line 4). Specifically, the picture Damien paints is one of a "blue-collar working class MC" (chorus), someone who tries to balance steady employment with his goal to rap for a living. All the challenges of this balancing act do not deter him, but rather, make Damien "wanna pick [the] mic up and rock harder" (line 16).

What this excerpt helps to illustrate is the variety of ways Houston artists explore issues familiar to a great deal of Americans, such as employment and class – through hip hop music. For instance, in the first line of the chorus, we see an example of self-identification. Here, the artist identifies himself as a "Blue collar workin' MC". The rest of the excerpt consists mostly in descriptive, narrative-like observations about Damien's circumstances; details that allow the artist to craft an on-mic persona, one whose interests

and values differ from those of the G. What Damien raps about above evokes another socially-available persona, "the struggling artist," specifically, the "Blue collar" MC.

Key here are observable differences between Damien and the established artists in terms of the form and content of their performances. Consider, for instance, how Paul Wall's verse from Chapter Four differs from Damien's, in so many ways. Before examining these rich social differences, let me first say I do not claim that these two verses represent the range of content and form found in each artist's body of work. What I do claim, based on the exploratory and clustering analyses, is that established artists, including Paul Wall, rap more (and more consistently) about specific social practices that tie them – through hip hop as public discourse – to the way-of-being for which I, and others, use the label, G. Established artists also emplace themselves directly and indirectly – through reference to social practices situated in, and indexical of, the physical environs in which they unfold.

By contrast, some artists, including Damien, rarely (if ever) overtly emplace themselves, or emphasize social practices that evoke lived experience in mostly-Black, working-class Houston neighborhoods. Although Damien hails from Hillwood – the same 'hood repped by one of Houston's most famous rappers, Lil Flip – he only once in four albums (LPs) mentions the neighborhood where he grew up. To better understand this asymmetry, consider the processes of intertextualization, in songs by artists including Lil Flip, through which Hillwood becomes emblematic of the G experience. As noted above, Damien rhetorically cultivates a persona distinct from the G, a "Blue collar working MC" who balances a day job with a career in hip hop. These two subjectivities, though admittedly fluid and polyphonous, differ consistently in fundamental ways.

For instance, established artists often depict the G hustling or grinding by "trapping" (i.e. selling drugs). Moreover, as the saying "grind before shine" suggests, these hustlers enjoy the risks they take in part through conspicuous consumption (i.e. "shinin'"). MCs such as Damien also emphasize "the hustle," but instead of selling drugs, they openly describe the struggle they face balancing a rap career with steady work in another profession. Hustling, then, holds different pragmatic potentials for these artists.

Consider that some artists value participation in the underground drug economy, and openly call attention to their (sometimes fictive) material success by rapping about clothing, jewelry, expensive cars, and other status symbols. For these artists, "grindin' and shinin'" take precedence in popular discourse. Hustling and its physical environs become intertwined (intertextually) through widely-circulated musical texts, performances that link practice, place, and persona. Place then, as argued throughout the dissertation, becomes emblematic of social experiences foreign to the circumstances of rappers such as Damien.

Returning briefly to Excerpt 6.2, I want to reiterate the point that artists including Damien, rappers who do not identify as Gs, and who do not engage in the class-biased practices giving social form to the G aesthetic, make less frequent use of the rhetorical strategies established artists use for self-presentation. What underlies this asymmetry is a matter of different perspectives on life as a rapper in Houston, stemming from different life experiences that include primary and secondary socialization, as well as socialization into distinctic, class-oriented taste cultures. Participation in such taste cultures involves cultivating an aesthetic and iconic subject position – the struggling artist – that reflect and

discursively construct a different take on rootedness and, more generally, a sense of legitimacy and authenticity.

To briefly sum up then, we see that my limited rhetorical model of G-ness helps show how some up-and-coming artists bring their work into dialogue with the music of established rappers by referring to social practices that cohere, through repeated recontextualizations, to evoke the rooted, street-oriented G persona. As I have argued, popular artists essentialize this subjectivity, linking the G to particular places through singularizing rhetoric that purports to "represent" authentic, lived experience of young Black rappers.

As we have seen, some artists orient – in some measure – to this recontextualizable framing of authenticity and rootedness. We see this orientation, for example, in the music of artists including Zeak, A Dub, and most importantly, Big Weed – Damien's parodic persona. For the first two rappers just mentioned, G-related stylistic practices function in the service of cultivating a street-savvi "gangsta" persona, someone who "grinds and shines." In Big Weed's case, we glimpse one artist's cultural model of G-ness by examining how perhaps the least "gangsta" rapper in the sample – Damien – invites the listener to critically examine his "over-the-top" (internet board cite) portrayal of what many Houston artists simply call "hood shit" or "street rap."

This case suggests that rappers share overlapping "norms of recognition," (Eckert 2000) knowledge of which allows them to "do difference," so to speak. For instance, Damien obviously has control over whether he presents himself as a G when rapping as himself. In other words, it is clear that Damien is aware of alternative norms, as he puts them to work to critique popular rap. Thus, by "styling the other" (Johnstone 1999,

Rampton 1999), Damien exemplifes the agency artists possess through recognizing dominant norms while adhering to a different set of conventions that reflect and aid in constructing a self-image in accord with Damien's experiences. These experiences, and Damien's unique circumstances, distinguish him socially from established artists who narrowly circumscribe "legitimate" performances of identity in local hip hop.

As I argue in the next chapter and the conclusion, artists including Damien, Fat Tony, LdaVoice, and Savvi find themselves in similar social circumstances, though they range in age from early 20's to mid-30's. Specifically, these college-educated artists opt to cultivate intellectually-mature, hard-working self-images that share little in common – beyond (occasional) references to place – with the G personae other artists evoke. We have seen that some artists take up this G subject position through reference to class-biased domains of praxis, including car culture, drug culture, and popular fashion.

These domains of experience simply do not resonate with Damien, or Fat Tony, or H.I.S.D. Though in the latter case, artists in H.I.S.D. do emplace themselves, they do not put themselves in the position of a G, but rather carve out a distinct place for themselves in Houston hip hop discourse. They do so in part by rapping about experiences that do not cohere with intertextual precedents for self-portrayal as a G, experiences that center around the difficulty succeeding as an MC, as well as challenges artists face who emphasize their rootedness, while styling personae who stand in opposition to the G. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, understanding these different orientations to the G and "struggling artist" subjectivities throws light on our analysis of phonetic variation among the artists.

Chapter Seven

Phonetic Variation: Fashioning Selves through Sound

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 6, I leveraged the efficacy of mixed models (qualitative and quantitative) to throw into relief subtle – and, in some cases, somewhat dramatic – differences in how artists orient to intertextual precedents for self-portrayal as a G. As Chart 6.1 and the cluster analysis helped to visually illustrate, artists vary significantly in the rhetorical use they make of G-related social practices, labels, and emplacement (recall Damien and Fat Tony, for instance). Undergirding this variation, as I have argued, are norms shared in dissonance, "norms of recognition" (Eckert 2000) valued differently by hip hop artists who live and lyrically portray distinct lifestyles. At the close of the previous chapter, for instance, I briefly discussed two personae associated with distinct life experiences and stylistic choices – the G and the struggling artist. Reified through labeling, these figures serve as flexible points of reference for artists to manage personae/impressions.

More importantly, stylistic practices emblematic of these figures index stances taken by artists through their use of such practices. For instance, material cultural practices associated with cohesive rhetorical constructions of the G figure may index a stance against systems of civil law and order. This stance, I argue, stands at odds with the values held by a loud minority of Houston artists, represented in Chart 6.1 and the dendrogram by a visual divide amongst the artists. In this chapter, I examine whether, and to what extent, stancetaking through rhetorical variation correlates with phonetic

variation. Specifically, I test the hypothesis that the "non-standard" monophthongal and lowered variants of /aw/ and /I/ pre-engma, respectively ("dahn" and "swang"), cohere in usage with rhetorical orientations to the G-figure, on which the rhetorical clusters from Chapter 6 are based.

In what follows, I use the Pearson correlation test in Minitab to evalute the interrelatedness of /aw/ monophthongization and /I/-lowering pre-engma. I then cluster the artists based on phonetic variation and compare the results to the dendrogram based on rhetorical asymmetries. Next, I run item analysis to determine to what extent phonetic and rhetorical variation "hang together." Finally, I use the clusters from Chapter 6 as dummy variables in a regression analysis of phonetic variation to determine to what extent G-related stancetaking explains asymmetries in the use of phonetic variants. Before discussing the results of these analysis, I turn first to a discussion of my motivation for selecting the phonetic variables.

7.2 Selecting the Phonetic Variables

I selected the two variables based on metalinguistic awareness of their socially-charged variation, revealed in interviews – including my brief exchange with Big Chance in the Introduction – and more casual recorded conversations, such as the following excpert with a local magazine publisher we shall call M:

Excerpt 7.1: M on "the Houston Sound"

1 M	I think Houston has established…
2	I mean not that you can't be from here and sound differently but,
3	what quote unquote is the Houston Sound
4 C	What is the Houston Sound?

5 M That "Man I'm comin' **dahn**, @@@@@
6 C @@@@@@@@ That's the
7 Hous[ton Sound]
8 M [that ---]
9 That like 'UHH nuh NUH nuh NUH'

Here, M demonstrates metalinguistic knowledge of /aw/ variation, embedded in the text "Man I'm comin' dahn." When asked what Houston hip hop "sounds" like, more than five people out of ten reproduced some variation of this text and the monophthongal variant it contains (in a pilot study for a related project). We also saw an example of metalinguistic knowledge in the exchange recounted in Chapter 4, in which a station regular commented on the discord between two productions – one verbal, one printed – of the "swing" variable.

Furthermore, even at the outset of my ethnographic research, these two variables stood out to me. Iconic songs, such as Lil Keke's "It's Going Down," frequently repeated the monphthongal variant of /aw/; and in songs such as ESG's "Swangin' and Bangin,'" we not only here the lowered variant of /I/ pre-engma, we see it spelt, in eye dialect, "Swang." By contrast, in the cases of what some might call dissenting voices in local hip hop, we hear rappers such as Fat Tony and Damien making almost no use of these variants. It is the goal of this chapter to rigorously explore how variation in the use of "swang" and "dahn" correlates with rhetorical articulations of G-ness. Furthermore, by comparing parodic and non-parodic performances, I throw light on the issue of agency in the use of phonetic variants for personae managagement (also discussed in the conclusion of Chapter 5).

7.3 Data and Methods

The data for the phonetic analysis come from the same collection of recordings, by the same artists, on which the analyses in Chapter 6 are based. In addition to these recordings, I also acoustically analyzed tokens of each variable in interviews with each artist (sans Big Weed, Damien's parodic persona). This measure was taken to ensure the quality of my (necessarily) impressionistic analysis of the performance data. Because the corpus of performances on which my analysis is based comprises a combination of "beats" (instrumental tracks) and lyrics into songs, and because a capellas (i.e. the verbal part only) were not available for a most artists in my sample, I could not acoustically analyze the performance data.

I therefore trained my ear to hear differences in vocalic productions while acoustically analyzing the interviews. After acoustic analysis, I listened to each artist's recordings and coded the tokens extracted binarily: as either lowered in the case of "swang," or monophthongized in the case of "dahn." This approach has the limitation of forcing vocalic productions that fall somewhere in the middle into distinct categories. Though not as fine-grained as approaches that take into account degrees of monophthongization, I chose a binary categorization system, as it proved difficult to discern with consistency a "half-glide" or "partially-lowered" variant.

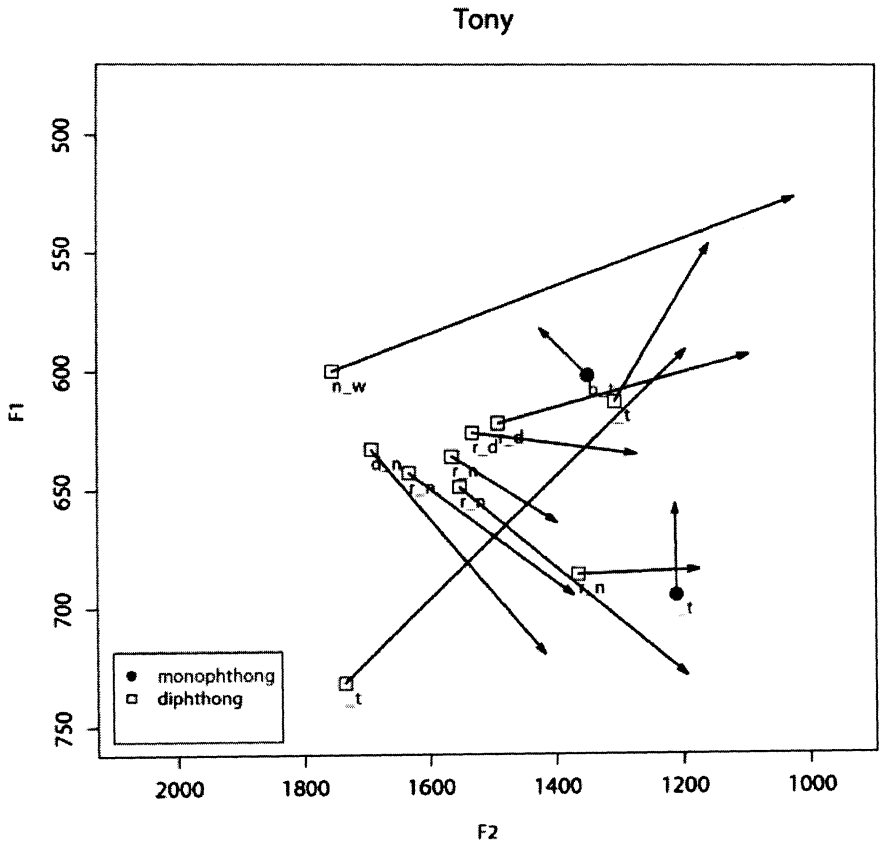
Regarding which tokens were not counted, I excluded distorted tokens and instances where conversation overlap made analysis impossible. In delimiting the envelope of variation, I omitted tokens that preceded or followed a vowel, approximant or liquid, as these environments dramatically change the formant structure, making them dissimilar from tokens produced in any other phonological environment. One exception

to this rule comes when a token, followed by a vowel, occurs turn finally. In such cases, the variable /aw/ is sometimes produced diphthongally, sometimes as a monophthong (e.g. "We know that **nah**"). To ensure comparibily across the recordings, I limited lexical items containing each variable to five instances.

For the acoustic analysis, I first coded – impressionistically – each token as either lowered or unlowered, monophthongal or diphthongal. In broad phonetic terms, there were three variants of "dahn": [da:n], [da:In], and [daUn]. I counted instances of the former two as monophthongal, as the vowel in [da:In] exhibits a short offglide after a steady state nuecleus. For both the data used in the impressionistic and acoustic analyses, I calculated a score for each speaker based on the impressionistic coding. I did so by dividing the total number of tokens by instances of the hypothesized G-related variants. The figures resulted in fractions, which I represent numerically with decimal points (e.g. Zeak's score for "dahn" is .76 and his score for "swang" is .88).

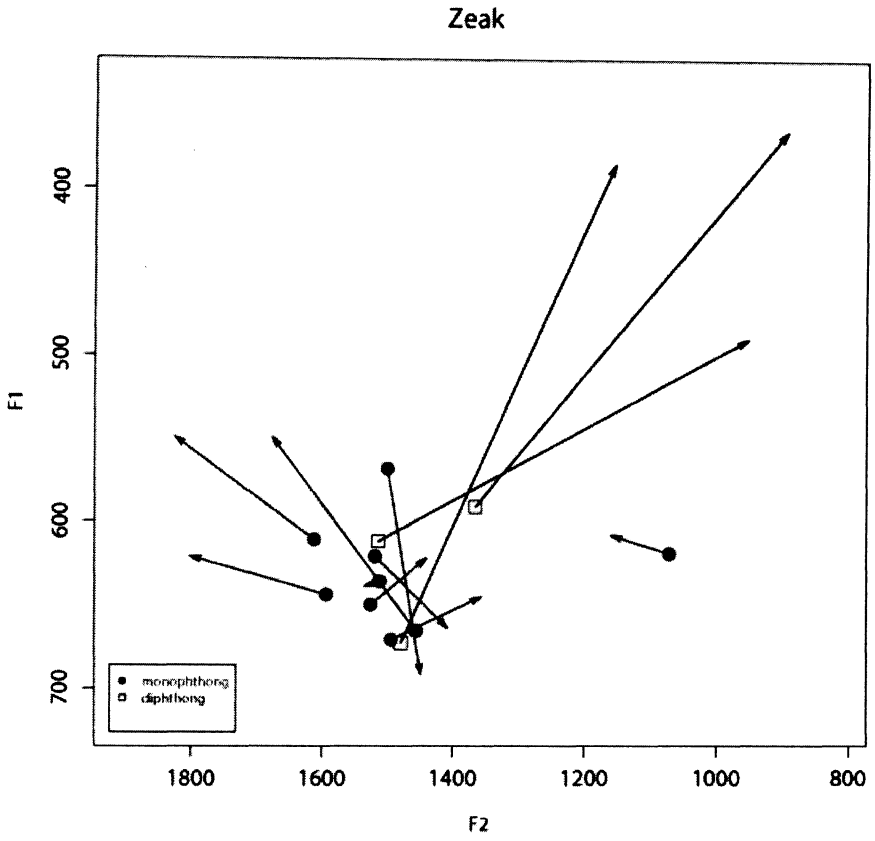
I next examined each token in PRAAT (Boersma and Weeninks 2011), taking measurements before and after visually-identifiable transitions. To illustrate the relationship between my ear and the acoustic analysis, I present my findings for Fat Tony in Figure 7.1:

Figure 7.1: Impressionistic and Acoustic Analyses Compared for Fat Tony



Here, in the legend, I have indicated with a red circle tokens I counted as monophthongal, and with a blue square, those tokens coded as diphthongs. Note that, of all the tokens, the two shortest, which happen also have a trajectory unlike the other tokens, were impressionistically counted as monopthongs. Compare this vowel plot and impressions with the following plot for Zeak:

Figure 7.2: Impressionistic and Acoustic Analyses Compared for Zeak



Here, in Figure 7.2, we see three tokens with a great deal of backing, highlighted in blue, which I judged to be dipthongs. The other tokens, coded in red circles, show much shorter trajectories, sometimes in the opposite direction.

As Figures 7.1 and 7.2 help show, it appears clear that there exist somewhat dramatic vocalic variation between two of the artists in the sample. These two artists reperesent the "upper" and "lower" ends of rhetorical variation to the G figure, as well as the extreme ends of monopthongization (and /I/-lowering, as we shall see). Furthermore, as the figures show, the judgments I made in the impressionistic analysis exhibit acoustic behavior consonant with phonetically-trained, ear-based decisions.

I present a type-token breakdown for each variant across artists below in Table 7.1. These raw data serve as input to calculating a score (zero to one) based on monophthongization or lowering. For example, in the case of the variable /I/ pre-engma, the score calculated reflects the percentage of tokens a particular artist realized with the variant "swang." Similarly, in the case of /aw/ monophthongization, the ratio calculated by dividing "dahn" variants by the total number of tokens yields a score we can compare across artists.

Table 7.1: Type-Token Breakdown for Each Artist

	Damien	Fat Tony	JB	LdaVoice	Kritikal	Savvi	Big Weed	Paul Wall	Lil Keke	Slim Thug	Zeak
Variants											
"swing"	18	13	4	10	18	7	13	6	1	5	2
"swang"	2	3	15	2	9	6	5	26	14	23	15
"down"	39	38	22	34	27	34	24	30	27	29	7
"dahn"	8	2	28	5	33	7	14	27	28	39	22
TOTALS	**67**	**56**	**69**	**51**	**87**	**54**	**56**	**89**	**70**	**96**	**46**

7.4 Analysis and Results

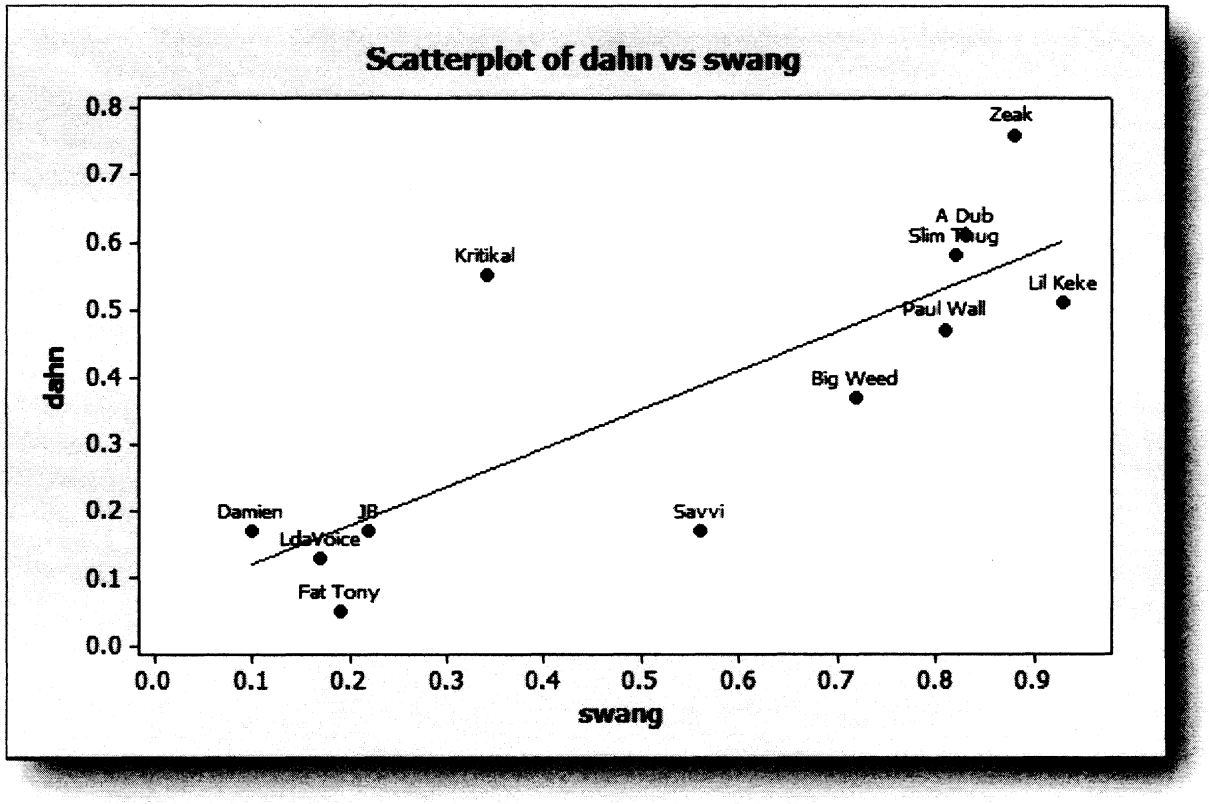
7.4.1 Exploratory Analysis and Pearson Correlation

As I suggested in §7.3, artists who represent the extremes in G self-portrayal also represent the widest range in cases of monpthongization and diphthonization. This preliminary finding speaks to the possibility of correlation between vocalic varition and rhetorical variation. To examine this relation, I first draw on the statistical power of Pearson correlation to determine the extent to which /aw/ and /I/ pre-engma covary across speakers. Consider the following results from a correlation test run in Minitab:

```
Pearson correlation of dahn and swang = 0.798
P-Value = 0.000
```

Here, we see that the variables pattern strongly together, yielding a p-value <0.000. In other words, we can say that monophthongization and /I/-lowering pre-engma significantly covary. That is, in Coupland's (2007) terms, the phonetic variables "hang together." With this in mind, I created a scatterplot of "dahn" plotted by "swang," based on the phonetic score calculated for each artist. In Figure 7.3 below, the X axis represents the degree to which each artist lowered tokens of /I/ pre-engma (measured in percentages; e.g. 0.8 = 80%), and the Y axis represents the degree to which each artist monphthongized /aw/.

Figure 7.3: Scatterplot of "dahn" vs "swang"



As the scatterplot clearly illustrates, artists who patterned together in the rhetorical analysis – including Damen, Fat Tony, LdaVoice, and JB – visually group together at the low end of our regression line in Figure 7.3. That is, none of these artists employ the monopthongal variant of /aw/, or the lowered variant of /I/ pre-engma, with high frequency or consistency. By contrast, we see that the established artists – as well as Zeak, Paul Wall, and to a lesser extent, Big Weed – trend toward the high end of the regression line. Save for Big Weed (more below), the other artists mentioned center closely around the upper end for each (hypothesized) G-related variant.

Notable exceptions include Kritikal and Savvi, each artist exhibiting asymmetrical use of the phonetic variants – in contrast with the other artists. In Kritikal's case, he monophthongizes /aw/ at a relatively high rate, comparable to linguistic behavior we observe for the established artists. However, he employs the lowerd variant of /I/ pre-engma at a rate quantitatively closer to the artists who, as I showed in the last chapter, do not orient rhetorically to the G persona. I propose that this discrepancy stems in part from both the geographic range of the variables and nuanced social meaning potentials.

For instance, as Morgan (2002) shows, rappers from South to the West use the "thang" variant. Because of its wide circulation and purchase, the variable does not become tethered to images of one distinct place, but rather takes on meaning through the stances taken by artists who employ the lowered variant. In his lyrics, Kritikal makes plain that he is not your average G; he's college educated, witty, and lyrically-skillful. "Thang," according to any version of a standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997), stands in contrast with its "standard" variant (i.e. imbued with value by powerful people and institutions, such as schools, the media, and dictionaries).

I conjecture that Kritikal's high use of "dahn" and infrequent use of "thang" corresponds well with his use of G-related rhetorical practices. Recall that, in Chart 6.1, Kritikal fell just to the left of the divide, as he did in the dendrogram. Car culture and fashion played an insignificant role in Kritikal's self-presentation. Nonetheless, he self-identifies as a G, as 'hood, as rooted in his experience of place. I propose that "dahn," a variable unique to a few locales in the U.S., provides artists with a resource to communicate a distinctly-Houston experience.

I argue thus because "dahn" is embedded in short texts explicitly tied to the cultivation of images that distinguish Houston from other scenes. "Swang," on the other hand, has wider currency, and thus stands to be valued in more multiplicitous ways, for instance, including through the lens of class. However, as we see from Savvi's point on the plot, some middle-class artists make relatively frequent use of this variant.

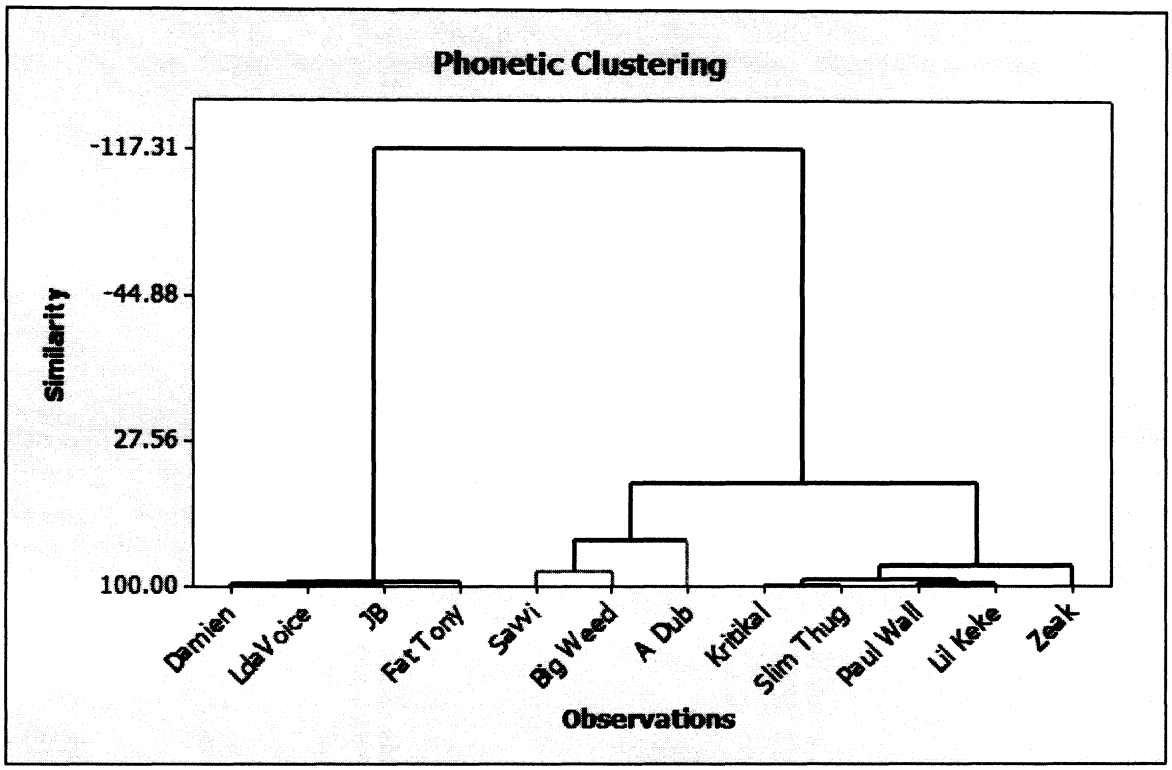
These two "outliers," I argue, draw needed attention to the "linguistic individual" (Johnstone 1996), to the construction of individual voices that trope on norms and confound group-centric analyses. As sociolinguists including Eckert (2008) have shown, meaning in linguistic variation is not simply socially shared, but in a fragmented, partial way. Though, on the whole, the data in my sample point to the importance of norms shared in dissonance, the individual differences we see in Kritikal and Savvi speak to the multiplicitous nature of meaning making in phonetic variation.

7.4.2 Phonetic Clustering

In the previous chapter, I used cluster analysis to ascertain data-driven groups of artists, based on usage of several pragmatically-delimited rhetorical strategies. The analysis

resulted in a preliminary grouping that confirmed initial observations, based on the stacked bar chart in Chapter 6. Here, I use the same hierarchical clustering algorithm and Pearson distance measure to explore how the artists in my sample group together according to their combined use of the phonetic variables. I present my findings below in Figure 7.4:

Figure 7.4: Phonetic Cluster Analysis



As we see, as in Figure 6.2 from the previous chapter, Damien, LdaVoice, Fat Tony, and JB cluster together. Furthermore, the figure reveals that the established artists in the study – Slim Thug, Paul Wall, and Lil Keke – tightly cluster together at a similarity level >95. These two groupings reflect consistent differences in the combinatorial use of the phonetic variants under study. In other words, rappers such as Damien cluster tightly with

other artists who frequently use the non-lowered and unmonophthongized variants of /I/ pre-engma and /aw/, respectively. By contrast, Zeak, the established artists, and even Kritikal cluster together at a high similarity level based on their relatively frequent use of the "dahn" and "swang" variants.

Regarding where Kritikal falls in the dendrogram, we can glean useful insights by comparing this configuration with that of the the rhetorical cluster analysis in Chapter 6. There, Kritikal did not closely pattern with artists I claim cultivate a G self-image. This statement comes with a caveat. As noted, Kritikal openly identifies as a G, but rejects singularizing representations of what such a subjectivity believes and values. What I suggest is the following, viz., that such observations illustrate how artists voice a street-oriented persona through sound (i.e. phonetic variation), while rhetorically portraying this voice in sociocultural terms distinct from its popular framings.

That is, although eight of the ten artists cluster together consistently across two semiotic modalities, two of them – Kritikal and Savvi, specifically – utilize the "swang" and "dahn" variables asymmetrically, reflected in their positions relative to the regression line. We cannot fully appreciate this asymmetrical usage without considering how it relates to each artist's use of the rhetorical strategies outlined in Chapter 6, as well as their engagement in other intersubjective tactics. To illustrate, consider the following lyrics from Savvi's verse in H.I.S.D.'s song "Galleria Chix," an homage to young, "Hollywood" (i.e. narcissistic) women who frequent Houston's high-end, uptown mall: The Galleria.

"Galleria Chix" (chorus)

1 Galleria chicks, some thin some thick
2 Some **thank** they all of that and a bag a chips
3 If you ain't gotta bag of chips, keep on walkin'
4 Cause that Galleria chick gon **thank** you stalkin'

Here, Savvi references an iconic Houston locale, the Galleria. Know more for haute couture than 'hood fashion, the artist evokes a place known for its cosmopolitan atmosphere. As I have already argued, H.I.S.D. openly rejects singularlizing portrayals of localness in Houston hip hop. Savvi connects the audience to his experience of a social hub for young people of various economic and ethnic backgrounds to mingle. Though far from the 'hood, the Galleria as an evokative site is juxtaposed with one salient facet of a voice linked in public discourse with the 'hood, namely, /I/ lowering pre-engma (twice, in lines 2 and 4).

This short excerpt speaks to H.I.S.D.'s openly-stated goal to reframe representations of Houston (or, as they spell it, *Hueston*) hip hop. Rhetorically, artists including Savvi emplace themselves by describing their experiences of concrete locales. However, as EQ of H.I.S.D. makes plain in his lyric "tippin' from a different lane," the group emphasizes an indigeneity distinct from the sense of rootedness reified through the G label. In the excerpt above, Savvi places himself in Houston, but in a locale hardly emblematic of lived experience in local Black communities.

Nevertheless, the artist evokes experience of and socialization in such communities linguistically, by using several AAVE variables, including the lexical variant "gon" ('going to'), so-called "zero copula" (in line 4), and – in two places - /I/ lowering pre-engma (in the word 'think'). Thus, as the excerpt helps show, phonetic

resources – indexical of socialization in cultural space – function in tandem with other linguistic variants to communicate a sense of rootedness, while the lyrics qualify and flesh out a distinct connection to place by referring to a locale that represents myriad experiences of "the local" (i.e. a multiplicitous indigeneity).

I want to point out here that, among the lexical items in which Savvi lowers /I/ pre-engma, we find high-frequency words such as "thing," "think," and "bring" (i.e. "thang," "thank," and "brang"). Notably absent are words which refer to iconic social practices such as "swang" and "drank." I conjecture that this absence is no coincidence, but rather evidence that the social practices to which these words refer do not resonate with artists such as Savvi and his group. Instead, key here is the phonetic variant contained in these words, lowered /I/ pre-engma. This variant holds the potential to evoke a connection to place, while the rhetorical strategies qualify and give distinct shape to this collective connection.

7.4.3 Item Analysis

Though Kritikal and Savvi present two cases in which the vocalic variables are utilized somewhat asymmetrically, the scatterplot in Figure 7.3, as well as the Pearson correlation discussed at the outset of the anlaysis, suggest a strong correlation between /I/ lowering before engma and /aw/ monophthongization. That is, artists who frequently monophthongize tend to lower, and vice versa. We may say, then, that the variables under study appear to hang together. In this section, I again use item analysis to ascertain the degree to which all variables considered up to this point – rhetorical and phonetic – statistically hang together.

Table 7.2: Item Analysis of Phonetic and Rhetorical Variables

Item Analysis and Total Statistics – Rhetorical and Phonetic Variation

Variable	Total Count	Mean	StDev		
Place	12	0.0726	0.0413		
Fashion	12	0.0213	0.0223		
Drug Culture	12	0.0373	0.0321		
Car Culture	12	0.0659	0.0781		
Self-Categorization	12	0.0155	0.0202		
Dahn	12	0.3783	0.2326		
swang	12	0.5475	0.3206		
Total	12	1.1385	0.6443		

Cronbach's Alpha = 0.8747 (significant, greater than the pre-chosen threshold of 0.7)

Omitted Item Statistics (all $\alpha < 0.8747$)

Omitted Variable	Adj. Total Mean	Adj. Total StDev	Item-Adj Total Corr	Squared Multiple Corr	Cronbach's Alpha
Place	1.0659	0.6265	0.5648	0.6909	0.8684
Fashion	1.1172	0.6327	0.6917	0.8123	0.8519
Drug Culture	1.1011	0.6237	0.5315	0.6145	0.8726
Car Culture	1.0726	0.583	0.6947	0.789	0.8515
Self-Categorization	1.1229	0.6346	0.6444	0.9293	0.8581
Dahn	0.7601	0.4347	0.8095	0.8917	0.8359
Swang	0.591	0.3592	0.6526	0.8936	0.8571

Since the rhetorical and phonetic variables are measured on different scales, I used Minitab's "Standardize Variables" option, which works by subtracting the means and dividing by the standard deviation before calculating a distance matrix. As we see in Table 7.2, Cronbach's alpha equals 0.8747 (highlighted above), statistically significant per the pre-chosen threshold 0.7. When the phonetic variables are added to the item analysis, α registers somewhat higher than when calculated with the rhetorical variables alone. In other words, evaluated collectively, the intertwined cross-modal variables strongly hang together.

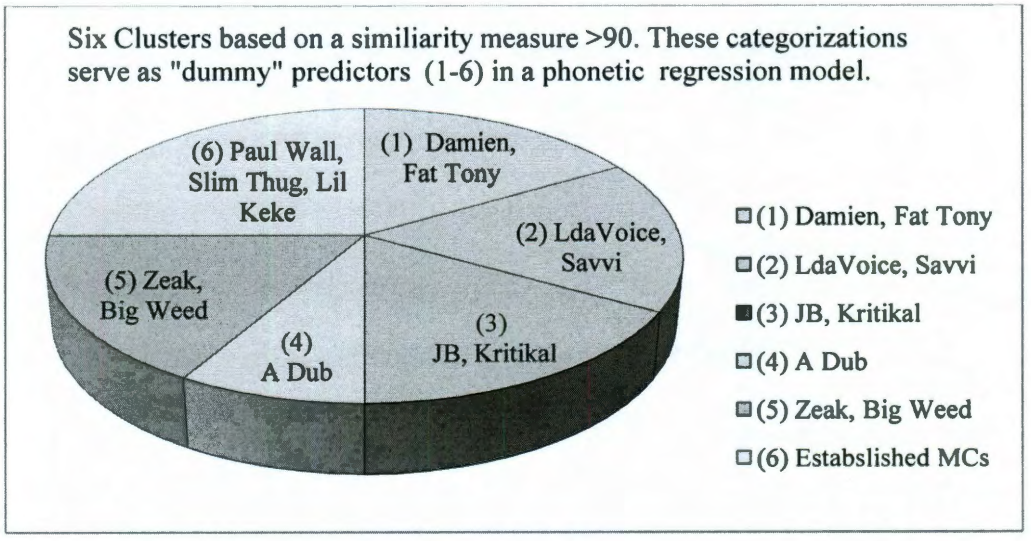
What this observation means, in practical terms, is that usage rates of the phonetic and rhetorical variables covary in significant measure. This finding illuminates the social functionality of phonetic variation, as the vocalic variables appear to stand in homologous relation to rhetorical strategies which possess a more transparent pragmatic potential. In other words, processes of lowering and monophthongization co-occur with pre-planned, rehearsed, formulaic strategies for rhetorically positioning oneself as a G.

In what follows, I will argue that the artist's conscious construction of disparate personae through the asymmetrical use of rhetorical strategies provides us with meaningful, tractable groupings that allow for in-depth investigation of the relationship between discursive maneuvering and phonetic variation. As I shall show, groupings based on the rhetorical clustering analysis factor centrally in linking overt social action through rhetoric and the implicit, indexical work carried out by phonetic variation.

7.4.4 Regression Analysis

The only statistical test yet to be described, linear regression provides us with a way of ascertaining the extent to which a set of "independent" variables (i.e. rhetorical groupings) predict behavior along the phonetic dimensions of monophthongization and lowering. Specifically, I use the groups based on the rhetorical clustering in Chapter 6 as dummy variables, assigning each successive group with a unique, sequential number, yielding Groups 1-6, presented below in Figure 7.5 for the sake of convenience. Note that, on the whole, as we move clockwise from Group 1 to Group 2, we see a gradual increase in the combinatorial use of emplacement and reference to G-related social practices. (This trend was first noted in the previous chapter, where I discussed the composition of each stacked bar in Chart 6.1.)

Figure 7.5: Rhetorical Clusters for Regression Analysis



What I intend to show through simple, linear regression, is that membership in groups 1-6 predicts – in some measure – the likelihood that artists will monopthongize and lower the variables under study. Here, I am proposing that phonetic variation can – in some measure – be explained by considering whether and to what extent (i) artists claim to be Gs, (ii) portray themselves engaging in G-related social practices, and (iii) emplace themselves, rhetorically. Put simply, I aim to show that artists who "talk the talk" and claim to "walk the walk" of the G are more likely to use the monophhtongal and lowered variants of /aw/ and /I/ pre-engma, respectively.

As I have argued throughout the dissertation, these variants are interwoven into texts such as "comin' dahn in the H-Tahn" and "sippin' drank on swang," short recontextualizable stretches of discourse that evoke a classed, racialized, gendered taste culture and its iconic representative, the G. Though the nature and amount of discursive knowledge (Giddens 1984) exercised in "choosing" a phonetic variant is debatable (see, for example, Trudgill (2008) and Coupland (2008) explore different sides of the issue), for hip hop artists, selecting which words to say, which short texts to incorporate, composing a verse and then rehearsing it – all these parts of the production process require a great deal of forethought and some measure of critical awareness regarding the meaning potentials of particular phrases and terms.

Specifically, I propose that hip hop artists seek to manage impressions of themselves through overt, rhetorical strategies, tactics that tie their personae to socially-located taste cultures and lifestyles. Furthermore, I argue that the "swang" and "dahn" variants serve both to evoke a sense of rootedness in general, and, more specifically, to enable artists to take up the G subject position – portrayed as unequivocally local in

popular Houston rap. I base this argument on the fact that the "swang" and "dahn" variants get recontextualized in popular rap music – and thus aquire shared indexical potentials – by virtue of their embedding in salient texts emblematic of G experience.

Key here are issues centering around metalinguistic awareness and agency in phonetic variation. Taking into consideration the premeditated and rehearsed qualities of the recorded hip hop performances we hear on albums, it is fair to say that rappers thoughtfully choose ways of describing themselves, sometimes through reference to social practices and labels, in order to manage impressions, or to linguistically manage personae (Coupland 2001).

Put differently, I claim that rappers make decisions about what to say on the mic based on their motives to manage personae. Thus, if a particular artist identifies with G-related portrayals of lived experience in Houston, that artist can employ short stretches of discourse – and even salient lexical items – that give this experience of place substantive form by linking it with concrete social practices, shared values, and material culture. In such cases, it seems rather uncontroversial to attribute agency to artists faced with myriad options for cultivating self-images, as these artists must employ certain rhetorical strategies in order to successfully manage impressions of their on-mic personae.

As regards the degree of agency artists exercise in choosing one phonetic variant over another, I should think it more controversial to simply assume that artists share a metalinguistic awareness of contrastive vocalic variants and their indexical potentials. An assumption along these lines is a necessary antecedent, however, to the possibility of acting on some form of metalinguistic knowledge through selecting specific phonetic variants to manage personae. What I propose, in order to validate more clearly the

metalinguistic assumption, is further comparison of the relationship between what artists say – i.e. what they say they do and where its done – with patterns of phonetic variation, across artists.

To this end, I have put the artists into groups based on similarities in their reference to and use of G-related labels and social practices, as well as how similarly they overtly emphasize their lived experience of place. I coded these groups as dummy variables that exhibit ordinal behavior ("levels" that meaningfully progress in linear order). Next, I used these groups (i.e. 1-6) as predictors in a regression analysis of each phonetic variable. My goal here is to establish a concrete relationship between pre-meditated decisions regarding rhetorical personae management, on the one hand, and phonetic variation "as social practice" (Eckert 2000), on the other hand.

Specifically, I argue that the two phonetic variables under study have become intermeshed with the stereotypic voice of the G and, consequently, prove useful to artists for rhetorically cultivating personae in (partial) accord with, or fundamentally opposed to, the G subjectivity. In other words, through the regression analysis, I throw into relief the sociocultural functionality of phonetic variation by examining whether and to what extent the more pragmatically-transparent rhetorical tactics predict relative rates of monophthongization and /I/ lowering pre-engma.

As noted above, I ran regression analyses for each phonetic variable, so that we could evaluate independently the role of G-related rhetoric in predicting how artists realize each variable. Here, I leverage the power of regression to illustrate connections between transparently-meaningful rhetorical strategies and evocative phonetic variables.

These analyses provide further, convergent evidence that "dahn" and "swang" have been swept up in the work of representation through the music of established artists.

Specifically, I suggest that the two variants have largely become indexical of the stances taken and lifestyles portrayed by established artists, namely, those of a G. Thus, tied to a historically-situated intertextual series (i.e. one's experience of Houston hip hop), the "dahn" and "swang" variants have become ideologically charged, publicly imbued with meaning potentials that facilitate impression management through phonetic variation. In other words, I propose that regression analysis provides invaluable insights regarding the pragmatic functions of "dahn" and "swang," by exploring the fit between data-driven groups – based on orientation to G-related practices – and the observed heterogeneity in the vocalic data.

For each regression analysis, I used the groupings in Figure 7.3 as a predictor variable, ranging in values from 1-6 (referred to below by the label RhetCluster). To evaluate the predictive power of these groupings, I chose the commonly-used threshold of <0.01 for p. The results of the regression analyses for /aw/ and /I/ pre-engma are presented below, in Tables 7.3 and 7.4, respectively.

Table 7.3: Regression Analysis of "dahn" versus RhetCluster

The regression equation is 'dahn' = 0.043 + 0.0916 'RhetCluster'				
Predictor	Coef	SE Coef	T	P
Constant	0.0426	0.1026	0.42	0.0685
RhetCluster	0.09156	0.025	3.66	0.004
S=0.159395	R-Sq = 57%	R-Sq(adj) = 53%		

Table 7.4: Regression Analysis of "swang" versus RhetCluster

The regression equation is 'swang' = 0.049 + 0.136 'RhetCluster'				
Predictor	Coef	SE Coef	T	p
Constant	0.0489	0.1252	0.39	
RhetCluster	0.13598	0.03051	4.46	0.001
S=0.194586	R-Sq = 66.5%	R-Sq(adj) = 53%		

As the tables show, the rhetorical groupings which produced the "RhetCluster" variable prove to be significant predictors of linguistic behavior. For instance, in Table 7.3, we observe that the p value for regression analysis of "dahn" is significant (0.004), registering at <.01, our pre-chosen threshold. Similarly, in Table 7.4, RhetCluster is clearly a significant predictor of /I/ lowering pre-engma, yielding a p value of 0.001. Thus, in both cases, our rhetorically-based groupings prove statistically significant in predicting rates of vocalic monophthongization and lowering.

What these results – together with insights from Chapter 6 – illustrate is an almost homologic relationship between rhetorical self-portrayal as a G and the phonetic processes of /I/ lowering ("swang") and /aw/ monophthongization ("dahn"). That is to say, these vocalic practices covary in significant measure with the degree to which rappers rhetorically take up the socially-available G figure. Overall, the results of each analysis hitherto presented converge to produce a fragmented understanding of the ways interrelated, cross-modal social practices (phonetic, rhetorical, material) cohere best at the extreme poles of distinct collective identities and indigeneities.

For example, groups 1 and 6 of the variable RhetCluster map onto significantly-distinct clusters in Figure 7.2 ("Phonetic Cluster Analysis"), at extreme ends of the

dendrogram. I interpret this kind of polarization as illustrative of two distinct voices in the local hip hop conversation, in rhetorical, phonetic, and material terms. Between these extremes, however, are artists whose rhetorical orientation to the G figure (or orientation to another socially-available persona) covaries in some measure with their rates of monophthongization and lowering.

Consider, for instance, the relationship between rhetoric and sound in the cases of Savvi, Kritkal, and Big Weed (Damien's parodic persona). Each artist falls in a rhetorical *and* phonetic cluster somewhere between the established artists (at the high end of the bivariate regression line in the scatterplot) and artists including Damien and Fat Tony (at the low end). Two of the three "in-between" (cf. Eckert 2000) artists – Savvi and Big Weed – actually form part of a phonetic subcluster at the center of the dendrogram in Figure 7.2. Kritikal also falls close to the center in the cluster analysis, at the edge of a subcluster one artist away from Savvi and Big Weed.

These results reveal several insights. First, as noted above, the rhetorical dimension of stylistic practice mirrors the phonetic dimension at the polar extremes of the regression line, as well as in the respective dendrograms. Considering the local currents in which these polarized artists participate (different "undergrounds" and "mainstream" hip hop), I argue that extreme lowering and monophthongization, as well as their complementary extremes, give vocalic shape to opposing voices: The G and "the struggling artist" (*mutatis mutandis*). Iconic local rappers, including Damien and Fat Tony, on the one hand, and the established artists, on the other, give form – in rhetorical, phonetic, and material terms – to socially-available personae.

Second, artists such as Kritikal and Savvi positively orient to place through rhetoric, but portray themselves in relation to and distinct from the polarizing voices of Houston's "undergrounds" in several ways. For instance, Savvi represents his 'hood and city while openly questioning and commenting on stereotypes of Houston rappers in his song "Cowboys." Similarly, Kritikal emphasizes lived experience of Houston, but he overtly rejects the practice of wearing "grillz" and jewelry that many established artists rap about. In both cases, the artists take on dominant lyrical portrayals of life in Houston by presenting (stylistic/social) alternatives.

These alternatives find phonetic form in asymmetrical use of the "swang" and "dahn" variants. Kritikal frequently uses the areally-distinctive "dahn" variant of /aw/, while rarely lowering /I/ pre-engma. By contrast, Savvi frequently uses the "swang" variant of /I/ pre-engma, while scarcely monophthongizing /aw/. These findings cohere pragmatically with Savvi and Kritikal's rhetorical ambivalence regarding a popular indigeneity in hip hop. I invite the reader to consider the possibility that Savvi stylizes (in the sense of Coupland (2007)) the "swang" variant, while Kritikal stylizes the "dahn" variant.

I propose these possibilities with key observations in mind. For instance, in interviews and conversations, Savvi rarely uses the "swang" variant, whereas in his performance, he uses it in significant measure. (We see the same situation for A Dub, who never uses the "swang" variant in the interview, but makes liberal use of it in his performances.) What this observations shows us is that Savvi has some command – conscious or otherwise – over the use of the lowered variant. In neither his interview nor his performances, however, does he monophthongize /aw/ significantly. I suggest that, in

Savvi's case, "swang" represents socially-available, internalized linguistic variation, and that the meaning potentials of this variant for Savvi make "swang" conducive to emphasizing a connection to place.

In Kritikal's case, we see the inverse of Savvi's linguistic behavior, namely, the artist monophthongizes /aw/ at rates comparable with established artists, but lowers /I/ pre-engma at a considerably lower rate. In an interview – as well as in our many casual conversations at the radio station – Kritikal often lowers the /Iŋ/ variable, as he does 9 of 27 times in his performances. Again, what this observation shows is that the artist has some knowledge – implicit or otherwise – of the formal variation and its social meaning potential(s).

In light of these observations, I propose that Kritikal and Savvi do in fact have some practical or discursive knowledge of "swang" and "dahn" variation, as both rappers produce each variant under different circumstances. However, what appears to differ between these artists are "norms of interpretation," (Eckert 2000), conventions which link sound as social practice with stances and personae. Considering Savvi and Kritikal first and foremost as "linguistic individuals" (Johnstone 1996), rather than part of an average phonetic score, I propose that these artists exhibit ideolectally-based differences in "swang" and "dahn" variation. In all likelihood, these differences stem from nuanced, fragmented (i.e. not socially shared between them) meanings the artists attribute asymmetrically to the two pronunciation variants in question.

Returning to a comparison of rhetorical and phonetic variation among the artists, a third insight revealed involves a topic tacitly touched on above, namely, agency in language variation. I would concede that, for a non-trivial amount of linguistic variation,

speakers may not have discursive (i.e. metalinguistic) knowledge of which variants exist (e.g. stop aspiration in English), or what –if any – social import these variants have for other speakers. However, Damien and his parodic alter-ego Big Weed provide a unique case for exploring "the limits of awareness" (Silverstein 1981) vis-à-vis the stances and subjectivities evoked by different language variants.

For instance, as "himself," Damien provides us with a baseline for artists at the extreme end of diphthongization and "canonical" realization of "swing," with the unlowered variant. This observation is reflected by Damien's position in the dendrogram and scatterplot. However, as his alter-ego Big Weed, the artist reproduces intertextual precedents for rhetorically cultivating a G image (references to fashion, car and drug culture). Furthermore, and most significantly, Big Weed phonetically approximates the linguistic behavior of established artists, as we see from his position in the scatterplot.

This unique case of intra-speaker/artist variation provides indisputable evidence that some of the artists socialized to be literate in local hip hop music share with established artists norms in dissonance, "norms of recognition" (Eckert 2000) that put the speaker on some shared sociocultural "map." Furthermore, artists including Damien (as well as King Midas as "Lil Big Yung") illustrate that, in designing their rehearsed performances, artists do – to some extent – exploit shared knowledge of dominant stylistic norms to reproduce them, part of a process where the voiced subject is critiques "himself," from the inside-out, so to speak. In other words, Damien's parodic performance provides insights into the agency artists exercise in managing personae, even in the case of (arguably) less "socially-available" dimensions of language, including phonetic variation. Thus, the analysis presented here contributes unique intra-speaker

data that bolsters approaches to style that take seriously the role of agency in phonetic variation (as social practice; Eckert 2000; Mendoza-Denton 1997, 2008).

Conclusion

8.1 So, What Does it Mean, *Soundin' Like You From Houston Texas*?

I end this work as I began it, by examining the same brief excerpt from my 2004 interview with local DJ / promoter Big Chance (BC). In the Introduction, I cited this excerpt to bring into play the key themes examined in this dissertation. Here, in light of the sociolinguistic analyses and ethnographically-based explanations outlined in the preceding chapters, I use the excerpt – repeated below as Excerpt 8.1 – as a springboard to discuss how examples described and analyses presented earlier illuminate themes such as (linguistic) norm sedimentation, linguistic representations of place and rootedness, stylistic hegemony, linguistic parody as social action, and the semiotic relationships among rhetorical strategies, phonetic variation, and (other) material/cultural practices.

Excerpt 8.1: Big Chance on "rappin like you from Houston Texas"

1	BC	And and y'know it, uh, uh, like I said it's a style like uh..
2		no other <H> AND, you know what I, you know what I hate, uh..
3		I—this is one thing I dislike about Houston artists…
4		They'll say, "ah" they'll come up to me "ah yeah I don' rap like that
5		comin' dahhn and, all that otha stuff", and what I tell people is, Dog, w—
6		it's nothin wrong with, that rappin like you from Houston Texas cause
7		some cats'll come down here and "ah I don't sound like these boys around
8		here" Well there's nothing wrong with nothing wrong with soundin like
9		'em it's what you put into it [I mean]
10	C	[thas right]
11	BC	it's, it's not—it's nothing wrong with soundin like 'em, cause I'm a tell
12		you what, The, the people you tryin sound like the East and the, and the,
13		and the, and the ATLs but you know how they tryin to sound like, you
14		know who they, who they listenin to? Yall, Houston cats. Down here
15		{dahn hiyuh}
16	C	mhmm
17	BC	You you you know, you don't want talk about syrup, but these diplomatic

18		cats {=a rap group from the East Coast} got a drink called sizzyrup, you
19		[know'm sayin'?]
20	C	[mmhmm]
21	BC	So...You, why you downgradin', it's like not be you, it's like, walkin
22		around not bein comfortable in your own skin

Regarding the theme of stylistic conventionalization, we see from lines 4-5 that a metalinguistic awareness exists in the hip hop community. It is this kind of awareness that made Damien's parody of popular local rap music possible; he not only knew which social practices to rap about in order to take on the G voice/subjectivity, but also, as the analyses in Chapters 5 and 7 show, Damien exploited knowledge of phonetic norms to critique established artists.

What these observations point to is a form of social knowledge, norms shared in dissonance among artists who participate in the field of hip hop cultural production. These "norms of recognition" (Eckert 2000) arise from a combination of repetition and consistency in iconic artists' usage of stylistic resources, toward coherent social ends (e.g. portraying oneself as a G, representing or authenticating Houston style, and distinguishing Houston from other spatially-circumscribed hip hop scenes). As I argued in Chapter 2, a range of factors make possible the sedimentation of this local knowledge, norms that link socially-available personae with style.

Among these factors, one's position in local social hierarchies plays a key role in determining their influence in shaping stylistic norms. As I argued in §3.4, established artists as social icons (Eckert 2000, 2008; Mendoza-Denton 2008) have the institutional support of record labels and, therefore, mainstream radio stations – giving these artists a voice that is frequently circulated locally and, in some cases, nationally. In other words,

these artists are in a position to circulate texts that frame authenticity and rootedness in terms of *their* lived (or imagined) experience of place.

Ultimately, the situation I describe is a problem of limited access to institutional channels of production, circulation, and consumption. This observation is key in understanding how giving certain artists more "airtime" (Eckert McConnell-Ginet 2003), thereby aiding in conferring their social status, creates what artists such as Fat Tony call "a big problem" for some local rappers. This problem involves the rise of a locally-shared model or, to put it in Tony's terms, stereotype, of what Houston rap sounds and looks like. The term "stereotype" itself carries negative connotations, profiling limiting and ultimately political process of presenting a narrow range of cultural practices and socially-available personae as distinctive of Houston.

What results is captured by Irvine and Gal's (2000) notion of erasure, an ideological process that obscures social difference by presenting (idealized) social-semiotic similarities among one statusful group as a matter of fact, "naturalized" through discourses of rootedness and distinctiveness. We see a subtle naturalizing move, as noted in the introduction, made by BC in line 6, where the DJ claims "It's nothin' wrong with, that rappin' like you from Houston Texas." Here, BC equates sounding rooted with popular Southside (and to some extent Northside) hip hop style through constructed dialogue. By recentering the semiotically-layered text "comin dahn," BC metonymically indexes a fluid, socially-shared style of which the short text – and phonetic variable it contains – is part and parcel.

My exchange with BC in our interview, as well as many other conversations I had with station regulars, indicate that local artists/subculturalists possess a metastylistic

awareness regarding which social practices have become narrowly-emblematic of Houston. These practices include those which are drug-related ("sippin' syrup"and "pourin' drank"), car-related ("ridin' chrome" and "swangin' the S.L.A.B"), and a limited range of sartorial practices (wearing "starched-down jeans," "grillz," or sporting a "Southside Fade" haircut). Established artists lyrically assert the distinctiveness (and representativeness) of these social practices in portraying Houston and, by extension, themselves, as culturally distinct from cultural images of other hip hop scenes.

These processes of inter-scene distinction can be viewed, alternatively, as the policing of semiotic boundaries through the essentializing rhetoric of established artists. Artists who stand at or even outside the margins of these boundaries, such as Fat Tony and Damien, face a problem of representation. This problem of representation surfaces in my conversation with BC, in lines 1-9. Here, Big Chance notes that he hates it when local artists disparage "rappin like you from Houston Texas" (line 6), a style evoked by BC's use of the entextualized expression "comin' dahn."

Central here is the fact that, through his constructed dialogue, BC makes known that some rappers in Houston disagree with, or negatively view, popular cultural models of what it sounds like to be a Houston rapper. As I noted in the Introduction, the constructed dialogue points to a homebred ambivalence centering around the politics of representation. Ultimately, credibility is at stake here when artists pick up the mic and claim to be from – or represent – Houston. When establishing credibility in this sense, i.e. a recognizable rootedness, artists cannot escape the entextualized framings of indigneity found in widely-available, socially-circulated performances of Houston's label-backed, nationally-known rappers.

These intertextual framings, including "swangin' and bangin," "sippin'drank," and "Comin' dahn in the H-Tahn," form a core of entextualized expressions involving material culture and social practices, indexical of a "take" on Houston hip hop. This "shared take" (Eckert 2003) is forged from collective – at the local level, communal – experiences of specific places, including neighborhoods or blocks, which themselves prove to be metonymic of socially-available personae and lifestyles. Ideologically associated with these places through institutionally-sanctioned discourse, recognizable personae such as the G and thug, as well as the stylistic practices which give them shape, complicate matters semiotically for artists who seek to represent their 'hoods, but who do not identify stylistically or experientially with the "texts of identity" (Shotter and Gergen 1989) available in popular local rap.

In Chapter 4, I discussed several situations in which metastylistic performances reinforced local norms. However, in one conversation I had at the radio station, I discovered a critical awareness of local stylistic expectations, illustrated in the following excerpt from my field notes:

Excerpt 8.2: On (Not) Being Southern/Houston Enough

M said he thought that K didn't really have a Houston sound on the first mixtape, and definitely not on the second mixtape. Basically the issue was that M thought K wasn't doing things that appealed to Houston people specifically, and the South more generally. He said

M: The South really has it now

Which was an answer to my question

C: So do you think that's a problem? [ie that (you think) K doesn't really have a Houston sound]

I asked if he thought there was only one way to appeal to people from Houston or the South, to which he responded "No", but Nibu chimed in

N: It's not that there's only one way, but there is a certain way
M: Yeah…
C: A certain style..?

This really pointed to the limited working room artists truly have in hip hop, at least if they see themselves trying to go through established mainstream channels of production, marketing, distribution, and consumption.

My reflections at the close of this passage point to the constraints of conventionalization. When something works in hip hop, aesthetically, it is due in part to mass appeal and local support. One example of just that scenario is the freestyle-based genre that developed around DJ Screw's group of artists, whose improvisational style influences strains of local hip hop to this day. Listeners and fans come to develop tastes for fluid semiotic conventions, produced by artists and beatsmiths, who minimize intertextual gaps between their performances and those of other artists.

As a result, artists and other subculturalists develop genre-related expectations regarding the stylistic practices Houston artists use. This process puts forward the ideas of those artists with access to means of circulation, creating tension between rappers who orient to place and local notions of authenticity differently. We see this tension in Excerpt 8.1, in which BC implicitly and overtly touches on competing norms and tastes by constructing a dialogue in which a fictive artist – meant to represent dissenting voices – "styles" (in the sense of Bakhtin or Coupland 2007) an imagined, collective voice of rappers who participate in a current of local hip hop whose style is naturalized through essentializing rhetoric and wide-scale circulation.

BC reveals a critical awareness in his constructed dialogue of this rhetoric, producing dominant conventional, associations between models of rootedness stylistic practices associated with popular Southside and Northside artists. This critical awareness

of sociolinguistic norms is key to self-presentation – rhetorically and phonetically – in local hip hop. For example, artists who lyrically cut a G figure do so with knowledge of shared norms regarding what stylistic practices work toward this end. Take, for example, the case of A Dub. As noted in Chapter 7, this artist frequently produces the lowered variant "swang" across his performances. However, in our interview, A Dub realizes the "swang" variable invariably as a diphthong – "thing."

What this intra-artist variation helps show is that, in crafting and rehearsing their performances, rappers knowledgeable of and fluent in local linguistic variation make choices at the phonetic level conducive to their goals in self-presentation. This claim, in light of recent scholarship (Trudgill 2008), is not universally accepted by students of language, culture, and society. However, I argue that hip hop, as a distinct field of discourse and cultural production, provides sociolinguists with unique insights into the "limits of awareness" (Silverstein 1981) and the agency exercised in self-presentation.

One angle I have taken to explore agency in language use – as well as the social norms rappers recognize and trope on – is to compare parodic and non-parodic performances by the same artists. In so doing, we gain further insights into the stylistic norms and the tension they create. We see this tension in BC's constructed dialogue (lines 4-9 of Excerpt 8.1), as well as in Excerpt 8.2, where an artist's stylistic indigeneity is in question. As noted earlier, these tensions revolve around issues of representation, specifically, the narrow portrayal of lived relations such as rootedness, in popular hip hop discourse. Artists marginalized by these essentializing portrayals take on singularizing representations through parody, interrogating and undermining the naturalness of local stylistic norms.

In Chapter 5, I presented a qualitative analysis of hip hop parody in which local artist King Midas crafted the parodic persona of "Lil Big Yung" (an oxymoronic name that pokes fun at stereotypic self-labeling practices in popular hip hop). As I pointed out at the end of that chapter, parody provides evidence that rappers orient to, develop an awareness of, and even develop some fluency in, a popular repertoire of stylistic practices. It is for these reasons I claim – along with Sclafani (2009) – that parody illustrates how social actors exploit a critical awareness potentiating social critique. In other words, intra-artist variation across parodic and non-parodic performances throw into stark relief not only competing norms and orientations, but shared knowledge of these norms.

Building on Carter's (2007) view of agency in language, inspired by Judith Butler (2004), I propose that, by isolating and examining instances where parodists employ popular stylistic practices, we throw into relief which norms – linguistic or otherwise – artists mutually recognize as inseparable from popular articulations of indigeneity. As Carter (2007) himself notes,

> For Butler and other Poststructuralist theorists, agency is about exercising choice within determinant limits. The agentive, then, does not pre-exist or operate outside of social context or ideology; indeed, the social and the ideological produce the possibility of volition.

In the present case, the "determinant limits" amount to norms shared in dissonance, conventions continually made and remade in popular hip hop discourse. Thus, by

comparing parodic and non-parodic performances by the same artists, we throw light not only on competing norms, but on a critical awareness of these norms that underpins agentive use of rhetorical and phonetic variation.

It is here, at the point of theorizing norms, awareness, and agency in linguistic variation, that Chapters 5-7 make a substantial contribution to the current theoretical conversation. As I point out above, my analysis of parody in Chapter 5 shows that some artists indeed recognize a popular stylistic normativity. Evidence for this recognition comes from Midas' reproduction of both rhetorical and phonetic practices , including G-based metastylistic discourse and /aw/ monophthongization. What we take away from the analysis of Lil Big Yung is clear sense of awareness through recognition: To successfully perform his parody, Kind Midas must "know" which generic conventions to exploit.

Similarly, in Chapters 6-7, I described how Damien is measurably fluent in the application of competing rhetorical and phonetic norms. I argue that these observations suggest that Damien makes a choice – mediated ideologically – when he recontextualizes rhetorical strategies and realizes a vocalic variant. Undergirding this argument is the meaningful relations between phonetic and rhetorical variation that centers around the cultivation of a G persona. Crucially, Chapters 6-7 show that G-imbued, intertextual strategies employed in rehearsed, pre-meditated performances statistically co-occur with the use of "swang" and "dahn."

Combined with the phonetic findings from Chapter 7, these parallels between rhetorical and phonetic variation among the artists point to meaningful, structured variation across semiotic modalities. By structured variation, I aim to capture the interrelatedness of /I/ lowering pre-engma, /aw/ monophthongization, and rhetorical

strategies for self-portrayal as a G (or culturally-similar subjectivity). Through quantitative and qualitative analyses in Chapters 6 and 7, I have demonstrated that, on the whole, artists who indexically portray themselves as Gs through rhetorical strategies also use the "swang" and "dahn" variants with greater frequency than artists who do not rhetorically orient to the G subjectivity.

Based on these findings, I propose that /aw/ monopthongization and /I/ lowering pre-engma play a significant role in managing impressions of oneself as a G. Furthermore, considering sociolinguistic parallels among artists who make medial use of G-imbued rhetorical practices and phonetic variants, I suggest that the "indexical field" (Eckert 2008) for each phonetic variant mutually overlap in significant ways. For example, the "swang" and "dahn" variants clearly index a G orientation, though the cultural contours of this orientation varies.

An inseparable component of this orientation, rootedness – or some sense of place – resonates strongly with the use of the "swang" and "dahn" variants, for all but one artist in the sample (LdaVoice). This finding speaks to the complexity of the relationship between place and language. Artists in the same group (H.I.S.D.), Savvi and Ldavoice both emplace themselves rhetorically, but only Savvi uses the "swang" variant at a rate comparable to the established artists. I propose that, for each individual artist, the indexically rich variants "dahn" and "swang" may evoke experiences of place at odds with their own.

For example, LdaVoice makes it clear where he is from and what his circumstances were: "see I'm from the hood, single moms no benjamins [=money]" ("Cold World"). He even recontextualizes a line from Lil Keke's famous Screw Tape

freestyle, "I'm draped up and dripped out" – evoking the practice of using "drank." However, LdaVoice exhibits the kind of homebred ambivalence I first discussed in the introduction, exemplified by BC's fictive interactant from Excerpt 8.1. Consider the following excerpt, for instance, from LdaVoice's verse on the song "The City:" "We from the Lone Star state, or the land of the hate."

Here, the artist offers a fairly neutral way of describing his home ("Lone Star state") and then suggests that we could also consider Texas "the land of the hate." I argue that LdaVoice refers here to negative attitudes toward stylistic practices made marginal by metastylistic discourse in popular Houston hip hop. The position taken by LdaVoice echoes one of the sentiments communicated by the character that BC's constructs in our exchange – namely, that he knows he sounds different from other (established) Houston rappers. LdaVoice exhibits this awareness when he describes a situation in High School at a talent show. The artist recounts in a song how the audience and other rappers told him to "go back to the East coast." He replies "But I don't even come from the East Coast!"

What this brief example illustrates is that LdaVoice possesses an awareness of the (negative) views some people have of his style, namely, that it is somehow inauthentically-local. I argue that such perceptions arise in large part because LdaVoice consistently does what the established artists do infrequently: He realizes /aw/ diphthongally and produces the raised (i.e. "swing") variant of /I/ pre-engma.

Here, I propose taking an agentive approach to understanding language variation, grounded in the foundational work of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Eckert (2000), Mendoza-Denton (2008), and Zhang (2008). The reasons behind taking this approach – instead of a

more mechanistic take on variation (e.g. Trudgill 2008) – center around awareness. Not only is LdaVoice aware that some of his stylistic practices give other subculturalists reason to evaluate him negatively (as inauthentically-local); he exhibits an awareness of stylistic alternatives to those he uses, substantiated by the following line from "Cold Lingo:" "She diggin' me mayne, cuz I was doin'my thang." In this excerpt, LdaVoice (1) uses "zero copula," (2) recontextualizes the distinctive Southside discourse marker "mayne" (=man), and (3) realizes /I/ pre-engma as "swang."

Crucial here is that this only instance of the lowered "swang" co-occurs with other linguistic elements whose combined use contributes to the production of a "street," G voice. I invite the reader to consider the following interpretation: Namely, that LdaVoice "stylizes" (Alim 2004, Bakhtin 1989, Coupland 2001) the "swang" variant here, leveraging its indexical potential to evoke a street-savvi, hustler orientation, conducive with the (arguable) aim of emphasizing his masculinity and charm with women. By combining several classed/racialized/gendered variants ("zero copula," "mayne," "swang"), LdaVoice reveals a critical awareness of alternatives to the stylistic practices he frequently employs.

This example of metastylistic awareness suggests, in the least, that LdaVoice has acquired enough knowledge of local stylistic variation to exploit formal differences rhetorically, stylizing local variants otherwise absent or rare in his performances. Returning to the matter of agency in phonetic variation, LdaVoice's metapragmatic awareness of the "swang" variable suggests that, although he knows "how" to use each variant, he exercises a mediated agency in frequently using the non-lowered variant.

This take on phonetic variation still proves far from controversial, despite recent scholarship supporting the notion that linguistic variation is a social practice (Eckert 2000), connected meaningfully with other semiotic practices through their combined use These cross-modal practices include the use of make-up (Mendoza-Denton 1997), wearing different styles of clothing (Eckert 1989, 2000), and getting distinctive haircuts (e.g. the "Southside Fade" in Houston). Bear in mind, I do not suggest that we "choose" which phonetic variant to use, consciously, in every case. However, building on previous scholarship, the findings presented in this dissertation do support a view of phonetic variation as a potential stancetaking resource (Johnstone 2007). As this dissertation illustrates, variation becomes a resource when imbued with partially-shared social meanings, in part through performative reflections on style that bring phonetic (and other modes of semiotic) variation into the sharp focus of public discourse.

8.2 Where We Are Now

As I write this conclusion, Houston hip hop's national exposure and circulation has dwindled considerably. Locally, support of and participation in what I have dubbed other "currents" (or taste cultures) of hip hop have grown. Fat Tony won Houston Press Best Underground Rapper of the Year three times. Currently, his work can be found on widely-circulated media including URB and Pitchfork. Furthermore, H.I.S.D. has signed a deal with magazine and label WaxxPoetics to distribute their next album.

Damien continues to work independently, having founded a record label and brand "Ethos Entertainment." Kritikal recently released a free album on the popular

website www.bandcamp.com, which has garnered attention. Unfortunately, the Circle Gz have mostly gone their separate ways to explore solo careers in hip hop. JB and Kritkal still come to the station (as do I, but much less frequently). Currently, Zeak has taken over as host of Damage Control and the show continues to be a success.

For what it's worth, I – with the help of close friends – have started a Texas-focused online web magazine that serves as a platform for local DJs, producers, and hip hop artists to gain some exposure. WeGetFamous (the name of our magazine) reaches out mostly to those cultural formations close to the margins, with the aim to highlight local talent who might remain "unconnected" in a sociopolitical sense. The magazine showcases and gives a voice to local artists and DJs – including Kritikal, who now writes for WeGetFamous (along with Nibu).

8.3 Where We Could Go

In this work we have covered considerable ground in exploring the sociohistorical processes at work in conventionalizing stylistic representations of authenticity and rootedness (in Houston hip hop). Following the theoretical framings of Chapters 2 and 3, the rest of the chapters examine – from one angle or another – how macro level processes of circulation, distribution, and consumption spread a relatively coherent "regime of representation." (Hall 1997) We can understand this metaphorical regime as a discourse of rootedness that puts forward one way of "doing local," essentializing the social practices and stances that give this sense of place shape.

Given the changing social scene in Houston hip hop presently, my study would benefit from a large-scale investigation of language/stylistic attitudes among participants in Houston's overlapping – and sometimes at odds – cultural currents. In 2007 I conducted a small-scale pilot study that examined how ten such participants judged excerpts from hip hop songs by relatively-unknown artists. The specific aim of this study was to explore what folk models linking place and language would be ephemerally constructed in the conversations of our semi-structured interviews.

What the results showed was that participants in local hip hop cultures not only possessed an awareness of "dahn" and "swang" as meaningful resources linked to characterological qualities, but also held beliefs about these and other related linguistic resources that surprised me. For instance, consider the following excerpt from a conversation with JB:

Excerpt 8.3: JB on Regional Differences in Hip Hop Language Use

C So what sorta sets that [=Southern rap] apart from like, I d'know cats, midwest cats or like
J well
C west coast cats
J Midwest cats are more some..
like Chicago, Kansas City whatever there on some like flippin, y'know, kinda, rapid fire, y'know
East coast are way more metaphorical,
and..west coast is more..
down to earth..y'know, with the proper tone..
you can hear it 'n you can tell y'know they..
their 'Rs' strong 'Rs' you know..
"goin to the, to the caR shop"..y'know..
they're real proper y'know…

Here, JB reproduces a popular cultural cartography that posits four main regions in the field of hip hop production – "the South," "the Midwest," "the East," and "the West." In the excerpt, JB describes artists from the East as more "metaphorical," and artists from the West as more "down to Earth." Regarding West-coast artists, JB focuses metalinguistically on the salience of R-fulness in their music, including the work of artists from cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley, California. JB continues by noting that these West-coast artists are "real proper y'know," on account of their R-fullness.

This snapshot of one artist's ideas about the ways place, language use, and identity intersect speak to the need for further investigation along folk linguistic lines. If we are serious about understanding the meaning potentials of linguistic variants, one angle on elucidating shared and conflicting attitudes lies in examining how subculturalists performatively construct language ideologies (Shuck 200?) that both reflect and (re)produce fluid subject positions in the "cultural landscape," positions relative to one another in terms of formal differences and opposing stances held by iconic artists who stand out as points of reference in this landscape.

Another direction I plan to take this project centers around the relationship between intertextuality and indexicality, with the aim of understanding *why* particular variables come to function as meaningful resources, rather than others. On the whole, I agree with Agha's (2003, 2005, 2008) views on *how* certain elements of a style (or register, to use Agha's term) come to cohere and become socially available for impression management. I would also suggest following Woolard's (2008) lead in examining vocalic variation beyond the syllable, as a phenomenon that bootstraps off of

the more formally-complex, ultimately entextualized stretches of discourse in which phonetic variation is embedded.

Though I touch on this issue in the present work, I have yet to design an empirically-based study that throws into relief the realization of different vocalic variants and their embedding in salient cultural terms, texts, and stancetaking strategies that incorporate these terms and texts. What I propose is exploring a model not unlike the metaphorically-based one Woolard (2008:447) uses, the "semiotic house that Jack built," in which Woolard draws on Errington's (1985) notion of "relative pragmatic salience" to understand and explain why some variables become imbued with stance-driven meanings (in large part by virtue of being embedded in intersubjective stancetaking strategies).

From my perspective, in light of my findings, it seems that this line of thought deserves more rigorous attention from sociolinguists. Cases have already been discussed in which local phonetic variation is linked with more formally-complex elements of language that have acquired some measure of shared meaning among speakers frequently exposed to such variation. For instance, Mendoza-Denton (1997, 2008) shows that /I/ variation among Latina youth is interwoven with the use of discourse markers that include pronominal forms such as "something" and "nothing," forms that contain the variable in question. Similarly, Johnstone et al (2002) demonstrates that monophthonization of /aw/ among Pittsburghers receives metalinguistic attention in representations of local speech that frequently contain the lexeme "downtown" (realized [da:nta:n]). By further exploring the relations among entextualized discourse and phonetic variation, I propose that we stand to gain immeasurable insights into the

processes by which particular variables become socially-meaningful resources in interaction.

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